Breaking the binary: exploring gender self-presentation and passing on #TransIsBeautiful on Instagram

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Abstract

The advent of social media enabled sexual minorities, as LGBTQ+ people, to find a community online. However, it can be difficult for transgender people to express their gender identity without risking a form of social injustice, as transgender people are not included in the prevailing gender binary. This thesis explores how transgender people present gender on the hashtag #TransIsBeautiful on Instagram and to what extent can a form of ‘passing’ be seen in how transgender people adhere to expressing societal gender norms. Goffman’s (1979) theory on gender display is adapted as a main framework to analyse 346 posts with a qualitative content analysis. The theories of gender display (1979) and self-presentation (1956) by Goffman and the concept of passing by Serano (2007) are also employed for a deeper understanding of the social construction of gender. Findings show a great diversity of gender self-presentation. Transgender people tend to express their masculinity and femininity in an exaggerated way, by emphasizing certain masculine and feminine aspects according to societal gender norms and therefore ‘pass’ as a ‘natural’ member of the gender binary. In complete contrast, there are also transgender people who challenge the gender binary by expressing themselves as non-binary. They represent themselves within and outside the gender binary by mixing and minimizing feminine and masculine aspects. These results show that for transgender people there are two ways of coping with societal gender norms and put the gender binary model into question.

Keywords: transgender; gender; gender binary; gender expression; self-presentation; passing, social media; Instagram
# Table of Contents

1. **Introduction** .................................................................................................................. 5
   1.1 Research Questions ........................................................................................................ 7

2. **Background** ................................................................................................................... 9
   2.1 Gender Spectrum .......................................................................................................... 9
   2.1.1 Gender and Sex .......................................................................................................... 9
   2.1.2 Gender Aspects ......................................................................................................... 10
   2.2 Who is Transgender? ..................................................................................................... 11
   2.2.1 The Institutionalization of Transsexuality ................................................................. 11
   2.2.2 Transgender or Transsexual? .................................................................................... 12
   2.2.3 Transgender Population .......................................................................................... 13

3. **Literature Review** .......................................................................................................... 15
   3.1 Social Construction of Gender ..................................................................................... 15
   3.2 Doing Gender ............................................................................................................... 16
   3.3 Gender Self-Presentations on Social Media .................................................................. 17
   3.4 Invisibility, Passing and Oppression ............................................................................ 21

4. **Theoretical Framework** ................................................................................................ 24
   4.1 Gender Display ............................................................................................................ 24
   4.2 Presentation of The Self ............................................................................................... 26
   4.3 Passing .......................................................................................................................... 28
   4.3 Composing The Theoretical Perspectives ................................................................... 30

5. **Setting The Scene: #TransIsBeautiful as a case study** ............................................... 32

6. **Methodology** ................................................................................................................ 34
   6.1 Qualitative Research ..................................................................................................... 34
   6.2 Qualitative Content Analysis ....................................................................................... 34
   6.3 Data Collection ............................................................................................................. 35
   6.4 The Analytical Model .................................................................................................. 36
   6.4.1 Deductive Approach ............................................................................................... 36
   6.4.2 Inductive Approach .................................................................................................. 37
   6.4.3 Hermeneutic Interpretation ...................................................................................... 38
   6.4.4 Coding Procedures and Operational Definitions ....................................................... 38
   6.6 Ethical Considerations .................................................................................................. 41

7. **Analysis** ........................................................................................................................ 42
   7.1 Hashtag Gender Representation ................................................................................. 42
   7.2 Binary Gender .............................................................................................................. 44
   7.2.1 Hyper Gender .......................................................................................................... 44
   7.2.2 Sexualised Gender ................................................................................................... 51
   7.3 Non-Binary Gender ...................................................................................................... 53
   7.3.1 Androgynous Gender ............................................................................................... 53
   7.3.2 Non-Binary Gender ................................................................................................. 56

8. **Discussion** .................................................................................................................... 60
   8.1 Answering the Research Questions ............................................................................. 60
   8.2 Limitations & Further Research .................................................................................. 64

**References** ....................................................................................................................... 66

**Appendix I Gender Terminology** .................................................................................... 76

**Appendix II Coding Scheme** .......................................................................................... 79
1. Introduction

Our world is changing. Over the last decade, digital information and communication technologies have caused many changes. With the internet and our digital devices we have easy access to information and knowledge, and we arrange many things ourselves nowadays. The advent of social media enables individuals, communities, organisations and movements to communicate, collaborate, inform and organise themselves in new ways (McCaughey & Ayers, 2003, p. 13), in particular, sexual minorities of the LGBTQ+ community. LGBTQ+ is an umbrella term for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer/Questioning, and others (Ok2beme, 2017). It refers to the community for people who do not conform to the general societal understanding of how a male or female should be, behave and appear (Goffman, 1979).

In the past few years, transgender people in particular have been increasingly depicted through various media, such as television, movies and the internet, resulting in more visibility of this sexual minority in the public eye. Transgender is someone whose gender identity, one’s internal sense of self, does not fit with their sex assigned at birth (UQU Queer Collective, 2015, p. 4). People who are transgender fall within or without the gender binary of being either female or male (Stryker & Whittle, 2006, p.3). Gender is often used by people to emphasize their sex (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 127). However, the meaning of gender depends heavily on societal norms and practices. One’s cultural definition on masculinity and femininity shapes the expectations about how women and men should be and behave, and therefore how people establish gender and influences these prevailing ideas (Wood, 2007, p. 20; Butler, 1990, p. 33). In other words, we are ‘doing’ gender, rather than something we ‘are’ or are born with (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 127). Therefore, we can learn a lot from transgender people about gender and sex and our tendency to categorise people (Erickson-Schroth, 2014, p. 3). Thereby, considering that transgender representations in general have a significant impact on the general public and transgender people about what it means to be transgender (Pappas, 2012, para 17). The expression or presentation of gender manifests itself through our appearances, by the way we dress and behave (Erickson-Schroth, 2014, p. 5). As addressed earlier, people are more complex and diverse then simple categorising them into the gender binary of female and male (Erickson-Schroth, 2014, pp. 3-5). And there are various ways in how transgender people may express their gender.
To celebrate and embrace gender diversity among transgender people, Laverne Cox, a transgender, LGBTQ+ activist and actress, created the hashtag #TransIsBeautiful in 2015. With this hashtag she aims to change the ways people treat and see transgender people, as there are transgender people who do not have the genetics and/or resources to embody these societal ideas on how women and men should be. And most importantly, there are also transgender people who do not want to meet these norms (Laverneox, 2015, para 1). The hashtag aims for social change, since transgender people are not included in the institutionalized gender binary.

The importance of this study mainly refers to the marginalized and vulnerable position of transgender people in our society. As a sexual minority, it can be difficult for transgender people to express themselves freely in public, without risking discrimination, harassment or violence and encountering socioeconomic and cultural injustice. For example, 59 percent of transgender people have avoided using a public restroom, as they were questioned (24 percent), verbally harassed (12 percent) or denied (9 percent) in the restroom, according to survey among transgender people in the US (James et al., 2015, p. 225).

This lack of social recognition is due to that transgender people do not fit into the socially constructed gender norms of women and men, as mentioned earlier. These social norms form certain expectations about the behaviour and appearance of a female or male in societies and cultures, and are considered as ‘natural’ (Gavac et al., 2017, p. 334; Sumner, 1907, pp 2-4). People who do not meet these societal gender norms are therefore treated differently. To overcome these obstacles, transgender people could live up to these societal gender norms and ‘pass’. Passing means that people ‘read’ the appearance and behaviour of a transgender individual as a cisgender woman or man (Serano, 2007). It is the essence of being transgender, to live a ‘normal’ life, according to Feinberg (2006, p. 207, 232). As a result, it may improve the quality of life of transgender people.

This study aims to contribute to the normalisation of transgender people. And that they should be able to freely live and express their gender, without risking various forms of injustice (Stryker & Whittle, 2006, p. 207). As transgender people are becoming more visible to society, they need to obtain recognition by society as well as academia. Furthermore, this
study aims to contribute to the lack of research on the impacts of passing on the gender expression of transgender people on social media.

As there are mostly only studies about the gender performance of people who fit into the gender binary (Back et al., 2010; Döring. et al., 2016; Oberst et al., 2015; Whitty, 2008). Research in transgender representation online may apply a better understanding of in which ways gender self-presentations are formed and maintained by the gender binary in our contemporary society. In addition, this study is an intersection between transgender, gender expression and digital media, therefore it will provide a contribution to various fields as media and communication studies, social studies and gender studies.

1.1 Research Questions

This study aims to provide an insight into the impact of the concept of passing on the gender expression of transgender people on social media.

With a qualitative content analysis, this study analysed 346 posts in the time span from 5 April 2017 to 19 April 2017. The theories of Goffman on gender display (1956) and gender performance (1979) and Serano’s (2007) on concept of passing are presented to explore to what extent gender in self-presentations are formed.

The research questions are the following:

RQ1. How do transgender people present gender on the hashtag #TransIsBeautiful on Instagram?

RQ2. To what extent can a form of ‘passing’ be seen in how transgender people adhere to expressing societal gender norms?

To investigate these research questions, I first introduced the main concepts of the study in this chapter. Then, in chapter two, relevant background related to the context of this study will be presented on the definition of gender and transgender. Chapter three presents previous studies and relevant literary background on the social construction of gender, gender self-presentations on social media and the invisibility, passing and oppression of transgender people. Next, in chapter four, the theoretical framework used in the analysis, will present Goffman’s theory on gender display and self-presentation. Followed up by Serano’s concept
of passing. Chapter five describe the case study of #TransIsBeautiful for further understanding this study. In chapter six, the methodological tools used for the aim of this study will be explained. Then, chapter seven present the analysis of the empirical data, interpreting the various ways of gender self-presentations of transgender people. I will end with a conclusion on the key findings in this study, followed up by acknowledging research limitations and suggestions for further research.
2. Background

This chapter starts with an introduction to gender. It will describe the differences between gender and sex, alongside other aspects within the gender spectrum. Then, a brief history and definition follows on transgender. In addition, various ideas and issues on gender will be elaborated, to understand the purpose of this study.

2.1 Gender Spectrum

Society expects people to appear, think and behave in certain ways according to their sex, referring to the biological differences, as either female or male. Born as a girl or boy, you learn to meet these different expectations and develop your gender identity, which is how we identify ourselves in terms of our gender (Vishnani, 2016). This will be further explained in this chapter. However, people are more complex and there are several variations in how we look like and in how we feel when it comes to gender (Erickson-Schroth, 2014, p. 3). Next to the most common gender binary of female or male, is gender a spectrum with many intermediates; there is a whole range of gender identities, such as transgender, cisgender, androgynous, genderfluid, non-binary and genderqueer (see appendix I for gender terminology).

2.1.1 Gender and Sex

First of all, it is important to distinguish the terms ‘sex’ and ‘gender’ from each other, as historically they were used interchangeably, while now they have distinct meanings in modern society (Newman, 2016, para 1). ‘Gender’ is the social and cultural interpretation of femininity and masculinity and changes over time, “they are defined and enforced by society. Gender roles give us rules about how we are supposed to behave and what kinds of opportunities and responsibilities are available to us” (Erickson-Schroth, 2014, p.82). West and Zimmerman (1987) define it as “the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one’s sex category. Gender activities emerge from and bolster claims to membership in a sex category” (p. 127). Which means that we are ‘doing’ gender, rather than something we ‘are’ or are born with (p. 127). On the other hand, ‘sex’ is the physical aspect of a female and male, which is generally determined at birth and seen as biological. We usually distinguish between female (XX
chromosomes) and male (XY chromosomes), with the typical sex aspects and reproductive organs (Eckert & McConnell, 2003, p. 10; Erickson-Schroth, 2014, p. 3). Yet there are other variations available, with other chromosomes (XXY, XYY) or ambiguous sexual aspects (Whittle, 2000, p. 17).

2.1.2 Gender Aspects

Gender consists of other aspects besides sex, namely gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation, see Figure 1 (Killerman, 2011, para 1). At first, ‘gender identity’ is “our inner sense of being male, female, something in-between, or something entirely different” (Erickson-Schroth, 2014, p.82). Usually this corresponds to the gender assigned at birth. For example, someone who is born in a male body and also feels as a male. We refer to this as ‘cisgender’ (p.6). There is much variety in the experience of being a man or a woman. And some people know from a young age or slowly later in life, that there is something different about themselves (p.3).

Second, sexuality is about the erotic and sexual desires of an individual, which can vary greatly (Stryker & Whittle, 2006, p. 588). Sexual orientation is about “the gender or genders of the people to whom we are attracted. For example, transgender people may be gay, straight, bisexual (attracted to both men and women), pansexual (attracted to all genders), or asexual (not sexually attracted to anyone)”, according to Erickson-Schroth (2014, p. 9).

Finally, the manifestation of masculinity or femininity is referred as gender expression. According to Erickson-Schroth (2014), “we choose our gender expression or gender presentation through our clothing, our hairstyles, and our behaviours, which help us present ourselves to the world as we want to be seen” (p. 5). The ways of expression usually refers to societal expectations based on the gender norms of a culture, as what in one culture or context is considered as masculine, could be feminine in another one. This study focuses on the gender expression of transgender people, by exploring how their appearances are.
2.2 Who is Transgender?

2.2.1 The Institutionalization of Transsexuality

The lives of transgender people have long been suppressed and ignored. Hirschfeld first described the term ‘transvestite’ or ‘cross-dresser’ in ‘Die Transvestiten’ in 1910, referring to people who wear clothes of the opposite sex and something that occurred in each sex and sexual orientation (Bullough, 1997, para 1). It was also Hirschfeld who used the term ‘transsexual’ for the first time in 1923. His ideas were ahead of time, as much later, Benjamin was one of the first authors next to Hirschfeld, who wrote about transsexuals in 1953. Transvestism and transsexualism were used to refer to transgender at that time. In 1966, Benjamin published ‘The Transsexual Phenomenon’, which was used a standard reference in the first constituted clinics (Stone, 2006, p. 228). The book “[created] a systematic way of thinking about the differing interrelationships between the sexed body, gender identity, and sexual desire that can be observed in various transgender phenomena” (Benjamin, 2006, p. 45). As a strong supporter of gender reassignment treatment (Williams, 2012, para. 8), he argued also that the gender dysphoria of transgender people cannot be changed by psychotherapy, as “gender is the nonsexual side of sex. [Or in other words], gender is located above, and sex below the belt” (Benjamin, 1966, p. 6). The only way to increase their comfort in life is to adapt the body to the gender identity (Benjamin, 1966, p. 53), because “there is hardly a person so unhappy constantly (before sex change) as the transsexual, [...] forever a candidate for self-mutilation, suicide, or its attempt” (Benjamin, 1966, p. 30).

Benjamin described six different types of the transvestism-transsexualism syndrome of transgender women, in what he called the ‘Sex Orientation Scale’ (SOS) (Benjamin, 1966, p. 15) He defined it as a taxonomy, classifying the different types, explaining there are part and full-time cross sex living people, but also people who take hormones or not, and people who take surgical intervention or not (Benjamin, 1966, p. 19). These types would determine whether someone was a ‘true transsexual’, as being in the ‘wrong’ body and detesting his male sex organ (Benjamin, 1966, p. 9, 19).

Historically, transgender people needed to fit the strict criteria as having no homosexual orientation or being married and ‘behave like’ women, as it was male-to-female cases (Stone, 2006, pp. 227-228). This was giving psychological and medical professionals complete control and power for them to find candidates with the highest probability of success. With the help of Benjamin’s ‘The Transsexual Phenomenon’ (1966), transgender people changed
their individual story in order to get the surgical interventions, as at that time that book was the only and standard reference (Stone, 2006, p. 228).

‘The Transsexual Phenomenon’ contained an interesting amount of information and opened the debate about transsexuality, but it is rather outdated now. Thereby, the book emphasises also on the ‘real-life test’ (Benjamin, 1966, p. 64), which became part of ‘Standards of Care’ developed by the ‘Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association’ in the 1970’s (Schilt, 2014, para 6). To be eligible for sex reassignment surgery transgender people need to pass tests and fit a certain image as a ‘true transsexual’ during a trial period. This entire procedure is necessary before the sex reassignment surgery, while this does not apply to cisgender people undergoing cosmetic surgery.

2.2.2 Transgender or Transsexual?

As have been mentioned, over time the terminology for transgender people has changed and varied. The term ‘transgender’ has been coined in the 1980’s and is used to describe people who do not or only partially identify with the gender they were assigned with at their birth (Stryker & Whittle, 2006, p.4; UQU Queer Collective, 2015, p. 4), such as transsexual, non-binary, pangender, genderqueer and genderfluid (UQU Queer Collective, 2015, pp. 4-5) (see appendix I for gender terminology). Feinberg defines it as a ‘pangender’ (see appendix I for gender terminology) umbrella term for “all individuals who were marginalized or oppressed due to their difference from social norms of gendered embodiment” (2006, p. 4) such as “transsexuals, drag queens, butches, hermaphrodites, cross-dressers, masculine women, effeminate men, sissies, tomboys, and anybody else willing to be interpolated by the term, who felt compelled to answer the call to mobilization” (Feinberg, 2006, p. 4)

Also Whittle sees transgender as an umbrella term, for people who express gender in a non-traditional ways:

“An umbrella term used to define a political and social community which is inclusive of transsexual people, transgender people, cross-dressers (transvestites), and other groups of ‘gender-variant’ people such as drag-queens and kings, butch lesbians, and ‘mannish’ or ‘passing’ women. ‘Transgender’ has also been used to refer to all persons who express gender in ways not traditionally associated with their sex. Similarly, it has also been used to
refer to people who express gender in non-traditional ways, but continue to identify as the sex assigned at birth (2000, p. 65).

Stryker and Whittle explain transgender by seeing gender as more complex and varied than the binary model:

“What began as a buzzword of the early 1990s has established itself as the term of choice, in both popular parlance and a variety specialist discourses, for a wide range of 25 phenomena that call attention to the fact that “gender,” as it is lived, embodied, experienced, performed, and encountered, is more complex and varied than can be accounted for by the currently dominant binary sex/gender ideology of Eurocentric modernity” (2006, p. 3)

In this study, I will be referring to transgender as gender identities who diverge from the dominant binary model of female and male, such as transgender man, non-binary, androgynous and genderfluid (see appendix I for gender terminology). It is an umbrella term for a variety of different forms of gender identity. In addition, people who are not transgender are described as ‘cisgender’ or non-transgender people (UQU, 2015, p. 4). Their gender identity fits with their birth-assigned sex (Winter et al., 2016, p. 391).

Furthermore, to put it briefly, the difference between transvestite, transsexual and transgender is:

“If a transvestite was somebody who episodically changed into the clothes of the so-called “other sex,” and a transsexual was somebody who permanently changed genitals in order to claim membership in a gender other than the one assigned at birth, then a transgender was somebody who permanently changed social gender through the public presentation of self, without recourse to genital transformation” (Stryker & Whittle, 2006, p.4).

2.2.3 Transgender Population

In 2016, a study estimated that there are 25 million transgender people in the world (Winters et al. 2016, p. 392). Flores et al. (2016) estimates that 0.6 percent of adults in the United States identify themselves as transgender, which means 1.4 million people (p. 3). The total population of Europe was estimated as 738 million in 2016 (World Population Review, 2016,
para 1). Applying the prevalence rate of 0.6 to this number, there are approximately 4.4 million transgender people in Europe. However, the transgender community is so diverse, therefore it is not always clear who should be counted and is it impossible to say how many people are exactly transgender in the world. Thereby, not all transgender people are registered, as not every transgender has the desire to go through genital reassignment surgeries, hormone treatment and/or legal gender recognition (Amnesty International, 2014, p. 11). It is important to note that not all people with gender dysphoria feel dissatisfaction with their own body, therefore the transgender community is much larger than what can possibly be estimated.

Furthermore, a diversity of gender can be found worldwide, while Western societies mainly adhere to the gender binary. For example, Hijra’s are a recognized group of people, who are considered as a third gender in South Asia. They have a feminine appearance and behaviour, but biologically there are a male. For thousands of years, they have played an important role in cultural events, such as in the blessing of newborn babies (Listverse, 2015).
3. Literature Review

This chapter will present previous studies on gender and self-presentation on social media.

3.1 Social Construction of Gender

Sex is often understood as natural and binary. This means that sex is based on anatomical facts and that there are two sexes. However, sex has not always been understood as binary. According to Laqueur in ‘Making Sex - Bodies and Gender from the Greeks to Freud’ (1990), the two-sex model has only been around for a few centuries. Until the end of the seventeenth century, male and female genitalia were seen as variations of one adaptable sex, as they believed there was only one kind of a human body, but with many genders (p.35). The female organs were the same as that of the male, only folded inwards into the body. Women had an internal penis and scrotum, instead of having a vagina and uterus. The ovaries were seen as testicles and the labia as foreskin (Laqueur, 1990, p. 4). In this one-sex model, the woman was an imperfect man (p.35). She was a lesser man (p. 149).

According to Laqueur (1990), our prevailing ideas about sex were invented sometime in the eighteenth century. Scientific discoveries and political changes transformed the one-sex model into a two-sex model. Laqueur elaborates this by saying that “all the complex ways in which resemblances among bodies, and between bodies and the cosmos, [formerly] confirmed a hierarchical world order were reduced to a single plane: nature. In the world of reductionist explanation, what mattered was the flat, horizontal, immovable foundation of physical fact: sex” (p. 151). From the eighteenth century men and women were seen as two completely different and opposite sexes. Biology determined the gender identities. Women were seen as passive and irrational, they were the weak sex (p. 150). Men were seen as active and rational, therefore they became the strong and dominant sex in the public space (Laqueur, 1990, p. 28, 135).

Laqueur says that the two-sex model is as much a construction as the one-sex model. Sex is not simple material fact, but a construction. That nature sometimes deviates from the norm of the two sexes is proven by the fact that often children are born with indeterminate sex. They are intersex due to unusual chromosomes or ambiguous genital structures. With corrective
surgery on the genitals and hormone treatments, the body is forced to fit into the social construction of the two-sex model. Often it is concealed from the person itself.

Another social construction is considering pink for girls and blue for boys. Colours have always had symbolic meanings, but our association of colours with a particular sex is a rather recent phenomena. Over time it gradually became more gender specific, according to catalogue descriptions and news articles (Paoletti, 2012, p. 90); “there has been a great diversity of opinion on the subject, but the generally accepted rule is pink for the boy and blue for the girl. The reason is that pink being a more decided and stronger colour is more suitable for the boy, while blue, which is more delicate and dainty, is prettier for the girl” (Ladies’ home journal, 1918, p.108; Paoletti, 2012, p.85). Since the 1860s, pink and blue are known as gendered colours. The usage of gender-specific clothing shifted through the years. It took a long time before people decided what colour belonged to which gender (Paoletti, 2012, p.89), “as it turned out, persuading people to follow a seemingly simple rule was complicated by taste, culture and religion” (p. 93).

3.2 Doing Gender

Gender is a social construct, in particular a binary construction that differs between male and female. One example that illustrates this is the colour of gender, as mentioned above. Theoretically this has been conceptualised by many scholars. West and Zimmerman (1987) argue that gender is something we have created, thus we are ‘doing’ gender and are not naturally born with it. Beauvoir (1997) puts it as “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (p. 295).

One of the most influential ones among them is Butler with her theory of gender performance, she explains that imitation and repetition determines how men and women need to appear and behave. She emphasizes that gender is a performance. She elaborates that gender is not caused by sex or fixed in the same way as sex. People see sex as something natural, as it is biological through our genitals (Butler, 1990, p. 9-10). Butler argues that this presumption actually retains the belief of gender mirroring sex, and suggests that “if the immutable character of sex is contested” (1990, p.10), sex is as culturally constructed as gender.

According to Butler, gender has no original; “in fact, it is a kind of imitation that produces the very notion of the original as an effect and consequence of the imitation itself” (Butler,
People learn to perform gender by looking at others, imitating their behaviour, identifying themselves with it and repeating these already socially established ideas. Society’s internalization makes gender occur as something ‘natural’ and determines the norm for how men and women need to appear and behave in a culture. The choices men and women make for specific styles, colours, fabrics, and articles of clothing, are not based on what the body requires, but on socially constructed norms of gender (Lunceford, 2010, p. 63). People who deviate from the gender norm and “fail to do their gender right” (Butler, 1990, p. 178), regularly get socially punished.

Butler believes that people who identify themselves as transgender, is caused by patriarchy and the societal construction of gender:

“I think patriarchy and the societal construction of the gender binary are what cause people to be [transgender]. The only reason people are ‘gender non-conforming’ or [transgender] is because we as a society create gendered expectation in the first place. If we viewed the spectrum of human aspects and emotions as simply attributes that anyone can possess instead of assigning them to one gender or the other, there would not be any kind of gender archetype to strive for” (Erickson-Schrotch, 2014, p.83).

3.3 Gender Self-Presentations on Social Media

Media representations have been a major influence on the everyday experiences of transgender people and on getting acceptance by society (Serano, 2013; Straube, 2014; Halberstam, 2005), especially within social media nowadays.

The internet is an important resource for transgender people, according to Heinz (2012). It offers access to knowledge, representation of transgender people, and mostly support from the community. Even though there is also transphobia online, these representations help others in their development and enlarge the ways people see transgender people, something that is inaccessible for most people in their offline lives. However, these representations also impact transgender people directly, as they are influenced by societal gender norms depicted through various media platforms (McInroy & Craig, 2015). According to Siebler (2012), the bodies of transgender people are strongly discussed, displayed, and regulated on the internet, and there is a lack in the representation of transgender people who resist the societal gender
norms of masculinity and femininity. As a result, there is the expectation to have a chest reduction surgery as a masculine transgender, and chest augmentation as a feminine transgender. In other words, these representations significantly influences the development of gender identities and expressions of transgender people, due to dominant gender norms in the digital world (Heinz, 2012; McInroy & Craig, 2015; Siebler, 2012).

Most recent research on gender at social media focused on identifying the differences between cisgender people, namely men and women. Döring, Reif, and Poeschl (2016) examined whether, as what they refer to as gender stereotypes, occurred in selfies on Instagram. The study used a quantitative content analysis with a random sample consisting of 500 selfies, in which 50 percent were male and 50 percent were female. The selfies were retrieved through the hashtags #selfie, #I, #me, #self and #myself. The analysis is based on Goffman’s (1979) and Kang’s (1997) categories. Furthermore, the results of the analysis were compared to the results of another study, which investigated gender stereotypes in advertisements from magazines, which also used 6 categories of Goffman and Kang (p. 959). The comparison showed that in four out of six categories, selfies were more gender stereotypical than the advertisements. For example, the category ‘feminine touch’ occurred 15.8 percent more on selfies than in advertisement. Herein, the women touched one’s face or body, which stands for soft and fragile (p.961). Women’s advertisements had a larger percentage with the categories ‘sparse clothing’ and ‘lying posture’. Male selfies often contained muscles, which represents strength (p. 961).

Furthermore, in this study, gender stereotyping according to clothing was not measured. Also, no distinction was made about selfies who represented a gender (through a hashtag) beyond the gender binary of male and female, such as queer or transgender. As there may be people who deliberately make a certain representation as they do not confirm with the binary norm, and therefore do not identify themselves as either female or male.

Kang (1997) added two categories to Goffman’s study, namely ‘body display’ and ‘independence/self-assertiveness’. ‘Body display’ is about the individual’s level of nudity. This means whether the individual is portrayed with body-revealing clothes, such as short skirts or revealing cleavage. Or by being unclothed through lingerie or even bare shoulders (p. 985). Finally, ‘independence/self-assertiveness’ examines the overall image on independence and self-assertiveness (p. 986), rather than focusing on details such as hands.
and position of the body (p. 985). In his study, he found that there were no significant changes in the portrayals of women in advertisements in 1979 and 1991, besides more stereotyping in the categories ‘licensed withdrawal’ and ‘body display’ (p.994).

Furthermore, Deaux & Lewis (1984) examined what they call gender stereotypes by aspects, physical appearance, occupations and role behaviour. They determined that there are strongly different ideas about men and women. When it comes to the physical aspects, men are considered as masculine by being tall, strong, sturdy, and broad-shouldered. While for women, a soft voice, dainty, graceful, and soft are considered as feminine (p. 999).

As part of the Transphobia Scale (Nagoshi et al. 2008, p. 526), Nagoshi (2013, p. 52,53) generated various physical aspects of gender on masculinity and femininity such as “[...] panties, skirt, long hair, deep voice [...] muscular, make-up, bras, estrogen, vagina, boxer shorts [...], high heels, facial hair, breasts, penis [and] testosterone [...]” (Nagoshi, 2010, p. x). These aspects were used to describe items as either male or female.

Several scholars suggest that self-presentations on social media are idealized selves, rather than actual personalities. Whitty (2008) found in her qualitative study on users of an Australian online dating site, that “participants believed that the need to present a good physical image of themselves was more important than any other characteristic” (p. 1714) one. As a result, “[they] experimented with what photos and descriptions of themselves would be more successful at attracting others to their profile” (p. 1715). Thereby, participants admitted that sometimes they misrepresent themselves, only “as a way to attract others” (p. 1714).

In contrast, Back et al. (2010), argues that social media is used by people for “expressing and communicating [their] real personality” (p. 374) and not an idealised self as is claimed by the previous mentioned studies. The study measured and compared the actual, idealised and observed personality aspects, the results showed no correlations on self-idealization (p. 373-374).

Online visibility is important for the LGBTQA+ community, according to the following studies. Cassidy (2013) examined with an ethnographic study the experiences of gay men and their identity management on social media. The study says that “the extension of gay men’s networks into mainstream social networking sites has important implications not only for the trajectory of gay men’s digital culture, but also for the approach to gay men’s mental health
taken by GLBT organisations and support groups”. This study shows the importance of online identity self-presentations for social acceptance.

Similarly, O’Neill (2014) conducted a study about how YouTube is a space for transgender youth to represent their gender identity. The social media platform offers five basic types of narratives for transgender youth: transition videos, DIY gender videos, trans blogs, trans anti-bullying videos and celebrity transgender vlogs. O’Neill states that YouTube is a space for self-expression and to “build an empathetic online community which respects the idea that, while every trans experience is different, there is a role for ongoing non-judgmental support for each individual at each stage of their journey” (O’Neill, 2014). This study shows how a social media platform plays a significant role in sharing and supporting people from the trans community in publicly expressing their gender identity. There are many studies on teens, gender and online identity, but not specifically about transgender people, therefore this is a significant study.

According to Oberst et al. (2015), Facebook “users tend to present themselves online in a less gender-stereotypical way than they actually see themselves in an offline context” (p. 562). This occurred more in women than in men, according to a study with 797 adolescents from Oberst et al. (2015, p. 561). These results are contrary to previous studies that state that men and women tend to present themselves with a more stereotypical masculinity and femininity (p. 560).

Over the past few years, an increased acceptance towards the LGBTQ+ community, its issues and rights has played an important role, such as the legalization of same-sex marriage, in a change in conventional ideas on gender (p. 563). This difference in self-presentation is also supported by the usage of androgyny in self-descriptions and to describe one’s well-being in a positive way (p. 562-563), showing acceptance towards gender ambiguity.

Another aspect that was highlighted in many studies was the sexualised performances of cisgender people. These studies have analysed visual self-presentations and found that users tended to portray themselves in seductive and sexualized ways.

Ringrose’s study on the online identities of adolescent girls on the social network site Bebo, found that girls represented themselves in sexualized ways (2011, p.101). Sexiness was visually portrayed by the use of images with the Playboy bunny and idealized self-images of slim and feminine bodies. Girls portrayed themselves with a major focus on their cleavage in
sparse clothes, such as a bikini (2011, p. 107). Furthermore, the textual analysis found that girls referred to language which services the phallus, but did not mention their own female erogenous zones (2011, p.112), reflecting the girl's’ expertise in sex. Ringrose refers to these ways of showing sexual repression and sexual attractiveness as the ‘pornification’ of online self-presentation (2011, p. 112).

Similarly, Kapidzic & Herring (2011) found that the self-presentation of teenage girls and boys both “reflect sexualized media portrayals” (p.9) on popular English-language teen chat sites. Girls portrayed themselves as sexual attractive by a seductive gaze, body posture and revealing clothing (p. 51), such as “head tilted, body angled, eyes looking up or sideways at the viewer” and revealing cleavage (p.49) On the other hand, boys have a demure, remote and dominant way presenting by looking away in the distance, looking down at the viewer (demand/submission) and looking straight at the viewer (seductive manner). However, some boys also pose seductively by showing their naked upper body (p. 49).

Also Siibak (2009), in a study about the motivation behind the choice for a profile picture in social network sites, found that boys and girls “emphasised the need to look beautiful” (2009, para. 30) in their visual self-presentation. Also, “sexiness and trend-conscious clothing” (para. 32) were important aspects to gain popularity online, rather than aspects such as interests and education (para. 26). Beautiful surroundings and significant others were far more important for girls, while sexiness and lifestyle were a more important aspects for boys (para. 19, 20, 23). Their online visual self-presentation reflects traditional gender roles and beauty norms, portraying the ideal self. Besides, the teenage participants could have give favourable aspects, influenced by the expectations of their parents (2009, para. 29).

3.4 Invisibility, Passing and Oppression

Transgender people are oppressed, as they do not match with the social norms of the gender binary, therefore they are hiding and invisible (Feinberg, 2006, p. 207), as Stone says “the class of invisible ones” (2006, p. 231). They are not able to live a life where they express their gender freely (Feinberg, 2006, p. 207). Not being able to express yourself, forces transgender people to ‘pass’ (p. 207): “to live successfully in the gender of choice, to be accepted as a ‘natural’ member of that gender” (Stone, 2006, p. 231). Stone complements Feinberg by saying that “the act of passing” (2006, p. 232) is the essence of transgender people, with the knowledge that they can pay an extremely high price for acceptance by
remaining ‘silence’ (p. 232). Passing means acceptance and to obtain this, you need to follow the gender binary, as a cisgender man or women. Therefore transgender people try to squeeze themselves into these dichotomous clichés to live a ‘normal’ life, according to Feinberg (2006, p. 207). A transgender man has to copy stereotypical masculine behaviour and a transgender woman has to acquire the archetypical feminine aspects (p. 207). Furthermore, passing also means that the less you stand out as a transgender, the less you will encounter violence, harassment or criticism (Feinberg, p. 205, 207). Simultaneously, passing maintains the gender binary, as there is no middle ground.

According to Spade (2006, pp. 315-332), the strict requirements for physical transition forces transgender people to construct their own history and gender expression towards the outside world, to prove that they actually belong to the opposite gender norm. Being transgender seems to be a process of reproducing gender stereotypes. As there is social pressure, both before and after the physical transition to be part of the gender binary (Spade, 2006, pp. 315-332).

In addition, there are transgender people who live a life where they are openly transgender. Next to that, there are also transgender people who are passing, but are living stealth. These people do not reveal that they are transgender after their transition. According to Erickson-Schroth (2014):

“This means that few, if any, of those around us know that we are transgender. Living stealth may be a matter of safety or privacy for some of us; for others, it is a matter of what feels natural and makes us happy. For most of us, our lives are combinations of living openly, passing, and being stealth depending on the context or situation” (p. 8).

Therefore, Stone (2006) argues that the gender identity of transgender people can be filled in different ways, and should not only be seen as having the “wrong body” with only the binary male/female options (p. 231). She suggests constituting transgender people as a genre, rather than a class or problematic “third gender”. A genre that has the potential to disrupt structured sexualities and explore the spectra of desire (Stone, 2006, p. 231), stating we need to disregard and expand the boundaries of gender binary. Passing would no longer be necessary with a counter discourse; transgender people would be understood and accepted without the boundaries of the binary discourse (Stone, 2006, p. 230). She calls transgender people to stop
hiding and be visible, referring to this as becoming ‘post transsexual’, and work together on a collective change, as “individual change is the foundation of all things, it is not the end of all things” (Stone, 2006, p. 232).

In addition, transgender people who do not fit in the social construction of the gender binary face mistreatment, harassment, violence, exclusion and even murder at home, school, work and the public space (Subhrajit, 2014, p. 318). According to the National Transgender Discrimination Survey among people living in the US, 41 percent of the transgender or gender non-conforming respondents have attempted to commit suicide, compared with 4.6 percent of the overall population and between 10 to 20 percent of lesbian, gay or bisexual people. Suicide attempts were significantly higher among transgender and gender non-conforming people who face rejection by family and friends, discrimination, victimization or violence (Herman et al., 2014, p. 2). Society treats transgender people different than cisgender people. Social isolation, low self-esteem, negative sexual/gender identity, depression, anxiety and other mental disorders are negative outcomes of this discrimination and are key aspects for a higher risk of suicide (U.S. Department of Health and Human Servics et al., 2012, p. 122).

Thereby, compared to the general population, the psychosocial well-being is not significantly different of transgender women with surgical intervention, such as facial feminization surgery (Ainsvworth & Spiegel, 2010, p. 1022).

According to Feinberg (2006), women and men can express themselves in various ways, therefore should transgender people be able to also live and express themselves without facing criticism or threats of violence (p.207). As passing has been identified in various studies as an overarching theme in performances of transgender identities, I will implement the theoretical notion concept of passing in my theoretical framework.
4. Theoretical Framework

This chapter will introduce and elaborate the theoretical framework. The study will be based mainly on Goffman’s theories of gender display (1979), self-presentation (1956) and Serano’s concept of passing (2007).

4.1 Gender Display

In the analysis of the ways of self-presentation of transgender people on #TransIsBeautiful, Goffman’s studies on the social and cultural construction of the self are applicable. According to Goffman, gender and our human behaviour are a cultural construction. In his study ‘Gender Advertisements’ (1979), he examines how men and women are displayed in social situations, and what these representations say about ourselves and how we view masculinity and femininity (p. vii). Our human behaviour embodies cultural values through gesture, expression and posture (p. vii) Goffman refers to this as ‘displays’, one’s individual behaviour and appearance which expresses their social identity, mood and intention. To explain, comparing this with animals, an animal “provides a readily readable expression” (p.1) about his intention, such as a threat, as animals act on instinct (p.1). Humans on the other hand are more complex as their act does not come natural, it is “socially learned and socially patterned” (p.7). Individuals shape their behaviour to the social norms and the expression of this aspect is seen by themselves as natural (p. vii), as “we are socialized to confirm our own hypotheses about our natures” (p.7). Thereby individuals express particular aspects or a version of themselves on strategic moments as a natural expression, while this is actually determined by “a socially established schedule” (p.7), only to create a certain image which is relevant to others (p.7). The same applies to the expression of gender, also referred to as ‘gender display’, which is considered as a natural expression of the biological or sex (p. 3). According to Goffman, animals and humans both express their sex (p.3). Through our behaviour we can identify each other as male or female. However, this particular behaviour and fundamental aspects are determined by culture (p.8). Humans actively learn themselves the expected gender roles and express them to comply to the social conventions. Therefore, the expression of gender identity is not natural but rather constructed:
“What the human nature of males and females really consists of, then, is a capacity to learn to provide and to read depictions of masculinity and femininity and a willingness to adhere to a schedule for presenting these pictures, and this capacity they have by virtue of being persons, not females or males. One might just as well say there is no gender identity. There is only a schedule for the portrayal of gender” (p.8).

In his study, Goffman describes how masculinity and femininity are displayed in Western advertisements. He shows that these displays do not display how men and women actually behave, but rather “how we think men and women behave” (p. vii). These images create the idea about “how men and women are, or want to be, or should be” (p. vii) in society, he refers to this as ‘hyper-ritualization’ (p.3).

Goffman (1979) distinguished six categories on the representation of gender. The first category is ‘relative size’, where the most important person in terms of social status is always displayed longer than others in an image. Traditionally, men are displayed taller and larger than women (p. 28). The ‘feminine touch’ relates to how hands are represented. Mainly women are displayed while using their hands and fingers. In these images, the women outlines, holds or touches objects and people rather light, soft or in a cradling way. The masculine touch on the other hand is powerful, strong and bold, as these hands are grasping, manipulating or holding objects and people. In addition, there is self-touching, when women touch their own face or body. These kinds of images imply the body as delicate and precious and therefore fragile. It is rare to find images of men being displayed in this way (p. 29-31).

In ‘function ranking’, the man is mainly displayed with an executive, instructive or other active role, while facing the woman who has the role of receiving by being instructed or passive (p. 32-35). The fourth category is ‘the family’, in which a standard family (father, mother, boy and girl) is represented with an emphasis on “the presumed special bond between the girl and the mother and the boy and the father” (p.37). Furthermore, in ‘ritualization of subordination’, women often have a subordinate position in relation to men through their position, posture or gaze. For example, women are displayed more often than men in a laying position, conveying them as submissive and dependent. Thereby, women are being sexualized in these displays due to their powerless position. Goffman says it is a
“conventionalized expression of sexual availability” (p.41), following how pornography expresses the sexuality of women.

Also, there are the imbalanced postures, such as a “bashful knee bend” (p.45) or a canting head or body. These postures are read as subordination and vulnerable, which is more common for women than men (p.48). While the posture of men are straight, readable as authoritative and strong. The final category ‘licensed withdrawal’ is about the facial posture and gaze, such as using hands to cover mouth or face or someone’s gaze turning away from another’s, which is common for women (p. 62).

Most notable about these gender displays is that these unnatural displayed men and women are regarded as something normal and not as something peculiar (p. 25). As people do not question them, we maintain these social gender norms. Goffman extensively examined the visual representation of masculinity and femininity and their relation to each other. Notable is that there is a lack of racial diversity, as only advertisements with white people are used. It is not clear whether this is a deliberate decision of Goffman or rather represents a period of time. Thereby, it is important to note that in his study, Goffman focused mainly on how femininity is displayed. However, by mirroring gender differences he also gives insight in the portrayal of masculinity.

4.2 Presentation of The Self

While gender and human behaviour are a cultural construction, according to Goffman, in his key work ‘The Presentation Of Self In Everyday Life’ (1956), he describes that self-presentation occurs in any face-to-face interaction between people, where they seek to form and obtain as much information as possible about each other, such as status, self-conception, attitudes, competence and trustworthiness, etc. (1956, p. 1). This self-presentation is as a theatrical performance, where in everyday life people are acting, such as an actor on stage. They express their identity while the audience views, reviews and interacts with the performance (p. Preface). The individual will therefore express himself intentionally and/or unintentionally, by performing a specific societal role to convey an impression he wants others to have about him (p.2). This need is driven by the desire to create an impression that corresponds with the individual’s identity (p. 31). The various societal roles actually exerts moral demands, as “society is organized on the principle that any individual who possesses certain social aspects has a moral right to expect that others will value and treat him in a
correspondingly appropriate way” (p. 6).

The performance is given on the ‘front stage’ (p.66), where:

“All the activity of an individual […] occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some influence on the observers. [It is] that part of the individual’s performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance. Front, then, is the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his performance” (p.13).

There are three parts which forms the performance and therefore the impression the audience will have of the performer. The ‘setting’ is the physical scenery and in most cases stays put, such as a bedroom (p.13). ‘Appearance’ refers to the personal front and consists of fixed attributes the individual carries around. This involves sex, age, race, posture, bodily gestures, and also clothing (p.14). While ‘appearance’ focuses on how we look like, ‘manner’ is about how we act, such as the individual’s attitude towards the audience (p.15).

However, Goffman says that fronts are institutionalized. They are constrained and established by societal norms, which requires “abstract stereotyped expectations” (p.17). As a result, these performances of social roles become a collective representation. Whenever an individual attempts to change front to an unestablished one, this front is seldom new (p.17).

There is also a ‘backstage’. Herein, activities and attributes occur to prepare for the performance. This may be adjustments for flaws on appearance or setting, or preparations to conceal certain attributes. Meanwhile, the performer can take of his front and relax, as the audience will not intrude (p. 70).

Hiding and changing these activities for the audience to maintain complete control over the performance is referred to as ‘impression management’ (p.70) According to Goffman (1956), people have the need to constantly control the impression people form during an interaction (p. 8).

During the performance, the individual expresses himself in a way to convey the impression he wants his audience to have. Goffman says that to acquire this, the individual “while in the presence of others, […] typically infuses his activity with signs which dramatically highlight
and portray confirmatory facts that may otherwise remain unapparent or obscure” (p.19). This dramatizing of a role is referred to as ‘dramatic realization’ and requires a significant amount of energy (p.21). As there are social roles that require certain activities and attributes to convince the audience that the performance is indeed the true self.

‘Misrepresentation’ may occur when a performance gets the impression of false or ambiguous when it does not meet the societal norms according to the audience (p.38). There are also performances where the individual represents an idealized self. This could be by reaffirming societal norms. Goffman refers to this as ‘idealisation’:

“[The] performance will tend to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values to the society, more so, in fact, than does his behaviour as a whole. To the degree that a performance highlights the common official values of the society in which it occurs” (p.23).

People may perform upward or even downward to express the ideal standards that the audience expects. This occurs by concealing certain attributes or activities (p.26) as, “there are many performances which could not have been given, had not tasks been done which were physically unclean, semi-illegal, cruel, and degrading in other ways; but these disturbing faces are seldom expressed during a performance” (p.28). For example, women represent themselves as flawless by correcting themselves with makeup or by concealing certain body parts. Thus they withhold what occurred backstage (p.27). By concealing what occurred before the performance, as a result, the audience gets the impression that the individual has always been that way.

4.3 Passing

When it comes to gender, gender identities can be expressed in many different ways. In here, the concept of ‘passing’ is important to some transgender people, as mentioned before. Passing refers to being accepted as a ‘natural’ member of your lived and self-identified gender (Serano, 2007, p.51). Often, it refers to transgender people being seen as cisgender (Serano, 2007, p. 313). According to Serano (2007), Western society has the incessant obsession with gender binaries and therefore also with passing. In particular, cisgender people have the need to ‘gender’ every person as either male or female.
In this situation, transgender people have the following two options as reaction: Either they try to live up to societal expectations on being a male or female, or they simply ignore societal expectations and be what they want to be. However, either way society will still judge them on their gender expression, and thereby whether their appearance is female or male (Serano, 2007, p. 311).

Cisgender people (and not transgender people) “create, foster, and enforce ‘passing’ by their tendency to treat [transgender people] in dramatically different ways based solely on the superficial criteria of [their] appearance” (Serrano, 2007, p.313). Because of this, transgender people live a life full of obstacles with a constant threat of discrimination, harassment and violence.

As transgender people are getting judged, derided and denied, the experience of passing may feel as “conditional cissexual privilege”, according to Serano (2007, p. 295). Whenever transgender people pass, they are being recognized in their self-identified sex and as a cisgender. This brings the benefits of a cisgender quality of life, privileges that are taking for granted, such as going to the restroom safely (p. 95). Cisgender people are entitled with their gender, as they identify, live and get recognised that way. While for transgender people this could be taken away at any time, when people discover that someone is transgender.

Therefore, passing concerns a double standard. Cisgender people do not need to conform to pass as a transgender. While all transgender people know that when they do pass, “being accepted as members of [their] identified sex makes it infinitely easier for [them] to gain employment and housing, to be taken seriously in our personal, social, and political endeavours, and to be able to walk down the street without being harassed or assaulted” (p. 341).

In addition, Serano finds the concept of passing rather problematic, as it implies that transgender people are “getting away with something” (p. 309). As many people internalise the idea that when transgender people do pass, they are ‘deceiving’ or ‘infiltrating’, when they know of their transgender identity. (p. 312). While their expressions of gender are simply a way of being themselves.

Passing is one of the most important issues among the transgender community, separating those who pass without difficulty and those who do not, as society does not recognize transgender identity.
Therefore, transgender people may feel the pressure to ‘pass’, conforming to societal gender norms and even conceal their transgender history by living stealth in order to not experience discrimination, harassment or even violence.

4.3 Composing The Theoretical Perspectives

To conclude, Goffman examined the differences in gender display of males and females, by analysing the different poses and positions of the body. He addressed several examples showing evident contrasts between males and females. These patterns appeared rather frequently, while this is not supported by ‘natural’ or biological logic. Goffman’s study on gender display can help to analyse how we view masculinity and femininity and therefore what the societal gender norms are, by examining the expression of gender identity of transgender people. This may give an idea about what kind of social learned and social patterns there are on gender. And moreover, what a ‘natural’ way of gender is. By analysing the expression of gender identities this may also give a view on what kind of ‘schedule’ transgender people may have. For example, this could be to pass a ‘natural’ member of a certain gender.

This study concentrates only on individual self-presentations, therefore not all categories of Goffman can be applied in this study, as he also examined how men and women were portrayed together. The following categories of Goffman will be used as a starting point for the analysis, as they are particularly relevant for this study: feminine (and masculine) touch (usage of hands), ritualization of subordination (position and posture of the body) and licensed withdrawal (facial posture).

Also the categories ‘body display’ from Kang (1997), mentioned in the literature review, will be used as a category for body revealing clothing. The physical aspects in the studies of Deaux and Lewis (1984) and Nagoshi et al. (2008) will be used to define masculinity and femininity in addition to Goffman’s theory.

Goffman’s categories will be used as guidelines, to determine femininity and masculinity and to find patterns in the expression of gender. It is important to note, that this study is not about whether people are expressing themselves as male or female, it is about the societal norms of gender and the influence of these ideas on the gender expression of transgender people.
Thereby, considering that my study focuses on the use of the hashtag #TransIsBeautiful, it seems more likely to get insights only into what Goffman refers to as frontstage, which focuses on the setting, appearance and manner of self-presentation and therefore gender expression. In this case, Instagram might be understood as the frontstage.

Goffman’s theory on self-presentation will be used to describe in which ways transgender people express themselves in their self-presentations and what kind of impression this may give to the public audience. Moreover, in what ways they convey the abstract gender expectations the audience may have and whether these self-presentations may be constrained and established by societal norms.

In addition, the concept of passing might help to further understand in the analysis how the performance of transgender people on the social media frontstage is used to ‘pass’ in front of the public audience, as society does not recognize transgender people. Serano’s view on passing will be used in this study, giving the importance that it may show to what extent passing constraints the various ways of gender expression of transgender people. In the analysis, this is how gender is expressed through their appearance (male, female and/or non-binary) and in what matter (idealised, dramatic and/or modest) by using Goffman’s studies, as mentioned above.
5. Setting The Scene: #TransIsBeautiful as a case study

This research involved a case study on the hashtag #TransIsBeautiful. The internet and social media made it possible for people who have previously been unheard and invisible to get a voice. Hashtags have the power to bring worldwide attention and mobilize people from all over the world (Khan-Ibarra, 2015, para 11).

The hashtag #TransIsBeautiful was created by Laverne Cox on 2 June 2015 after she published a blog post on her Tumblr about the viral Vanity Fair cover of Caitlin Jenner, her transition and what this means for the transgender community. Laverne Cox is transgender and a LGBTQ+ activist and Emmy-nominated actress. Caitlin Jenner is also transgender and a LGBTQ activist and former Olympic champion and reality television star (Brockes, 2017, para 1, 3.) Cox stresses about acceptance, visibility, privilege and how Jenner and herself embody societal gender norms, while “there are many trans folks because of genetics and/or lack of material access who will never be able to embody these standards. More importantly many [transgender people] don’t want to embody them and we shouldn’t have to be seen as ourselves and respected as ourselves. It is important to note that these standards are also informed by race, class and ability among other intersections” (Laverne Cox, 2015, para 1).

She points out the need for more diverse media performances of transgender people “to multiply [transgender] narratives in the media and depict [their] beautiful diversities” (Laverne Cox, 2015, para 1). Thus, she started this hashtag for those less privileged and who do not ‘pass’. Cox says that the hashtag” #TransIsBeautiful is about, whether you’re [transgender] or not, celebrating all those things that make us uniquely ourselves. Most [transgender people] don’t have the privileges Caitlyn and I now have. It is those [transgender people] we must continue to lift up, get them access to healthcare, jobs, housing, safe streets, safe schools and homes for our young people. We must lift up the stories of those most at risk, statistically trans people of colour who are poor and working class” (Laverne Cox, 2015, para 1). In January 2017 the hashtag is included in more than 300.000 messages on Instagram and consists primarily of self-presentations, supported by written messages and other hashtags.
It is relevant to explore how transgender people express themselves and in #TransIsBeautiful, as the hashtag strives to change the ways people treat and see transgender people from personal conversations, media performances and public bathrooms for men and women (Korn, 2015, para 8). They want social change, since the institutionalized gender binary model does not include transgender people. The hashtag aims to celebrate and embrace what makes us unique, whether you are transgender or not.
6. Methodology

This chapter begins with a description of the chosen research method. Qualitative content analysis will be explained and how this method has been applied to the study.

6.1 Qualitative Research

The purpose of this study is to analyse the ways of self-presentation of transgender people and the impact of passing on hashtag #TransIsBeautiful on Instagram. In order to better understand these ways of expression, this study used a qualitative research method. Qualitative research focuses on gaining a deep understanding of “how people experience something” (Hanock et al., 2009, p.4) through description and interpretation (Hanock et al., 2009). It aims to explain social phenomena, such as “why people behave the way they do” (Hanock et al., 2009, p.7) and how they form opinions and attitudes (Hanock et al., 2009). Furthermore, it is “less [about] to test what is already known (e.g., theories already formulated in advance), but to discover and develop the new and to develop empirically grounded theories” (Flick, 2009, p. 15). Therefore, a qualitative method is appropriate for this study as previous studies focused on cisgender people and their gender stereotyping on digital media, there is a lack about the perspective of transgender people. In addition, a qualitative approach is characterized by its “openness towards their objects” and “to do justice to the diversity of everyday life” (Flick, 2009, p. 15). Thus, it does not “exclusively follow abstract academic criteria of science as in quantitative research” (Flick, 2009, p.15), by this flexibility, it enables to emerge understanding from the collected data in the research process.

6.2 Qualitative Content Analysis

Online communities are an important research field as the number of people using the internet has tripled in the last ten years. In 2005, there were 1 billion internet users. This number has grown at the end of 2015 to about 3.2 billion internet users, this is 40 percent of the world’s population (World Bank, 2016, p. xiii, 2). Although my research method study is not netnography, I will use some of Kozinets suggestions. Which will be explained further in this chapter. According to Kozinets (2010), online environments have an important meaning
for participants as “these communications act as media of cultural transaction - the exchange not only of information, but also of systems of meaning. Online communities form or manifest cultures, the “learned beliefs, values, and customs that serve to order, guide, and direct the behaviour of a particular society or group”” (Arnould & Wallendorf, 1994, p. 485 f.2; Kozinets, 2010, p.12).

Qualitative content analysis is a research method that interprets meaning from the content of the collected data “through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p.1278). Therefore this is an appropriate method to study online communities. This study is conducted with a qualitative content analysis with a deductive and inductive approach, and will be further explained in this chapter.

I have considered Instagram as a suitable social network site to conduct a qualitative content analysis, as its main focus is to generate visual content and interaction among its users. Therefore, together with a qualitative content analysis it was an appropriate research method to gain an in-depth knowledge about in which ways gender is expressed and perhaps constrained in the online self-presentation of transgender people.

6.3 Data Collection

First, I followed the hashtag in a time scope of two months to observe how many posts were tagged with the hashtag per day and if there were any outliers with specific reasons. Over that period of time, on average 500 - 700 posts were shared per day with no significant outliers. Therefore the analysis does not focus on reflecting developments in the hashtags, but rather on gaining an understanding of what kind of content is produced by users of the hashtag. The following analysis refers to a sample of 450 posts on Instagram through systematic random sampling. In the time span from 5 April 2017 to 19 April 2017, on each day 30 posts were collected by taking every 20th post, as the hashtag is included on average around 500 - 700 posts per day.

As this study focuses particularly on self-presentations, the data collection required pictures of one individual only. 104 posts were excluded who consisted elements such as a groups of people or videos and could not fulfil the criteria of a picture with only one person. The final sample size is 346 posts. These collected posts were saved as a visual image by manually capturing screenshots of the data.
It is important to note that this study does not represent a generalizable phenomenon, it is “particularistic and contextual” (Hanock et al., 2009, p. 11) to gain a deep understanding on how transgender people present gender in their self-presentations under the chosen hashtag #TransIsBeautiful.

6.4 The Analytical Model

The analysis explored 346 posts with images of self-presentations and their corresponding hashtags. The images were analysed on how they expressed gender by ways of expressing aspects of masculinity, femininity and/or within and beyond this gender binary, such as through body posture and clothing. In addition, the corresponding hashtags were considered on whether they expressed specific gender identities.

The analytical model emerged from a deductive and inductive approach, together with a hermeneutic interpretation. This will be further explained below.

6.4.1 Deductive Approach

First, the analytical model was only developed with a deductive approach. Categories were derived from theory and relevant research findings as guidance for coding. Pre-existing theories on self-presentation and gender containing categorical variables were used in the analysis of the data. This deductive approach identified in which various ways the data supported, contradicted, and/or challenged previous research about in which ways transgender people express their gender and confirm to societal norms (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Categories of Goffman (1956, 1979) were used as a starting point for the analysis, as they are particularly relevant for this study: feminine (and masculine) touch (usage of hands), ritualization of subordination (position and posture of the body) and licensed withdrawal (facial posture). Furthermore, in what matter these aspects were expressed (idealized and/or dramatic). Also the categories ‘body display’ from Kang (1997), mentioned in the literature review, were used as a category for body revealing clothing. The physical aspects in the studies of Deaux and Lewis (1984) and Nagoshi et al. (2008) were used to define masculinity and femininity, in addition to Goffman’s theories.
In this approach, the development of analytical categories aimed to examine whether, and if so, to what extent the theory applies to the data. After a pilot study of examining 30 images, it became clear that the coding categories from existing theories needed to be expanded more, and focus on gender aspects beyond the gender binary. The pilot study showed that there are transgender people who clearly express certain gender aspects in their self-presentations, according to the applied theories. However, in some cases there were also transgender people with only one aspect to categorize, but this did not make them a lesser man, woman or other. In these cases or equivalent, it was necessary to add a different perspective to understand the diverse self-presentations of transgender people. Moreover, a strong emphasis on the theory only may bias me as a researcher and blind me for important contextual aspects in the data. As a researcher this stimulated me to think about the meaning and scope of my findings, and forced me to examine my material much deeper than only with the pre-existing theoretical categories. As it seemed that the existing theories focused on whether certain gender aspects occurred in self-presentations and not to what extent. Therefore, an inductive approach was applied to explore this new phenomenon, which emerged during the deductive analysis.

6.4.2 Inductive Approach

With an inductive approach, coding was supplemented with categories that were developed based on the collective data, which is by working bottom up. Also referred as open coding. All the screenshots of posts were assigned with categories emerged inductively “through a close reading of the data, rather than mainly being imposed by prescribed categories” (Kozinets, 2010, p. 119). Then, the assigned categories were compared and contrasted to locate patterns, such as similarities and differences (Kozinets, 2010, p. 122). Goffman’s categories were used as guidelines, to determine femininity and masculinity, and to find patterns in the expression of gender. After multiple pilot studies, categories and themes were revised, added and refined through open coding. It was expanded with the categories androgynous or non-binary: mixture / exaggeration / no evident aspects of masculinity and / or femininity. Furthermore, other relevant gender binary aspects were added as relevant coding categories, such as breasts and facial aspects. Overarching themes derived from frequent and significant categories, and categorized to what extent gender aspects were expressed: hyper (excessive emphasis on gender binary aspects), sexualised (excessive emphasis on sexuality), androgynous (mixture of gender aspects), and non-binary.
(modest/non-evident emphasis). These themes are used to interpret the diversity into which extent the concept of passing is applied on the data.

This combined approach leads to identifying the applied theories, but also to new patterns and regularities to answer in which ways gender was expressed in the self-presentations of transgender people. Thereby, this approach offers the support or extension of existing theory. Usually, a general theory does not exactly match with the data and will also lead to further empirical nuance and refinement of theoretical concepts. Therefore, using existing theory during the analysis requires a combination of the inductive and deductive approach. Findings can be presented by showing categories with exemplars, supported by descriptive evidence (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). For this study, the analytical model is appropriate as it explores specific issues and leaves room to discover unexpected aspects.

6.4.3 Hermeneutic Interpretation
In addition to the deductive and inductive approach, hermeneutic interpretation was also applied. It is about the deeper meaning of a post, focusing on ‘why’ this post was posted instead of ‘what’ does the post says. The aim is an explanation, rather than a description (Kozinets, 2010, p. 122). According to Thompson “a good hermeneutic interpretation will delve into the social and historical contexts of the data for its explanations, providing a subtle, specific, nuanced cultural interpretation” (as quoted in Kozinets, 2010, p. 120). This way of interpreting is used to describe the concept of passing. The self-presentations of transgender people may be used to ‘pass’ in front of the public audience, as society does not recognize transgender people, and it may show to what extent passing constraints the various ways of gender expression of transgender people. In the analysis, this will interpreted by to what extent gender aspects are expressed, as mentioned above. This method is used to get a deeper insight and therefore to understand the meaning of a post by delving into the context.

6.4.4 Coding Procedures and Operational Definitions
In order to analyse the qualitative data, as mentioned earlier, a coding scheme was developed with categorical variables to code and describe the images’ ways of gender self-presentations, focusing on the identification of expressed gender identities and masculine and feminine
aspects, such as muscles and breasts. The coding scheme provided definitions of categories and additional information, mainly adapted from Goffman (1956, 1979), focusing on the individual’s display of gender, as Goffman’s study focused mainly on how women and men were portrayed together and in which ways gender roles were represented. Categorical variables derived from Goffman’s and other relevant studies were used as a starting point and were further expanded during the analysis, as mentioned earlier. As has been touched upon in my previous research section when talking about gender identities, the construction of a gender identity is always product as a differentiation of another gender identity (male and female). In order to show how a non-binary gender identity is constructed through #TransIsBeautiful, I will also include the ways in which the binary concept of female and male gender identities are contested. In particular, I will analyse how they are contested for achieving a “passing” in front of the public audience. Therefore it is necessary to define masculinity and femininity for the analysis. Each image was coded with the following categories of the coding scheme; see Table 1. An elaborated coding scheme with further description can be found in Appendix II.

Table 1. Coding scheme

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CODING SCHEME</th>
<th>NOTES</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0/ gender (by assigned hashtag)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 1/ gender | masculine/feminine  
androgynous/non-binary |
| 2/ body posture | straight/imbalance |
| 3/ body position: | standing/sitting/lying |
| 4/ self-touch: | no touching/self-touch |
### Operational Definitions of masculinity and femininity

Different aspects were explored to determine whether an individual expressed masculinity or femininity, such as by clothing, hairstyles, makeup, body parts (muscles and breasts) and accessories.

**Masculine:** Individuals who presented themselves as a transgender man expressing masculinity were more likely to have short hair, facial hair, body hair, muscles and broad shoulders. Clothes they wear were tank tops, sleeveless shirts, t-shirts, hats or in some cases were even being shirtless.

**Feminine:** Individuals who presented themselves as a transgender woman expressing femininity were more likely to have long hair, a revealing cleavage, are sparsely and tighter dressed by dresses, skirts and lingerie, heavy usage of makeup and accessories such as jewellery and high heels.

After coding, the following themes were created about various ways of gender expression with the hashtag, as “a theme is an outcome of coding, categorization, and analytic reflection, not something that is, in itself, coded” (Saldana, 2013, p. 13): hyper gender, sexualised gender and androgynous and non-binary gender.

| 5/ gaze: | 
|---|---|
| direct/withdrawal |  
| 6/ clothing: | 
| full clothing/sparse clothing/ suggestive clothing/naked |  
| 7/ face: | 
| facial hair/makeup |  
| 8/ breasts: | 
| not a focal point/somewhat emphasized/major focus |  
| 9/ sexual attractiveness: | 
| gaze/clothing/posture |
6.6 Ethical Considerations

As Instagram is a public platform, asking for consent is not required, as people can put their account on private. When a user has a private account, a post with the corresponding hashtag will not appear on the public hashtag page. For Instagram you only need an account to have access to the platform to see all open accounts and hashtags. However, although Instagram is a public platform, ethical considerations should still be negotiated, as this study involves people. It is possible that the participants in my study are not aware of their public performance. Meanwhile, I assign them into categories in my analysis, but there is the possibility that they do not want to be part of that. Mostly because they do not have the opportunity to voice their opinion and I interpret them only from my own subject manner. Thereby, people could have various reasons for not wanting to have their online identity being distributed without given a form of consent.

The chosen qualitative research method has an advantage and disadvantage that needs to be explained. An advantage is that through non-participatory research, I have conducted naturalistic observation and therefore the research findings correspond with the everyday behaviour of people in the real world. However, people did not know that they are participants of this study, therefore to ensure a form of anonymity, posts used in this study are anonymised by making the individual’s identity unrecognizable by deleting personal information in their text and image, such as concealing names (Wiles et al., 2012, p. 47). Thereby, quotations will not be inserted in the analysis, to ensure confidentiality by not sharing data of “what is said by the participants” (Saunders et al., 2015, p. 617).
7. Analysis

This chapter will first present an overview of how transgender people in the posts analysed, present themselves through other hashtags in addition to #TransIsBeautiful. Hashtags were counted manually together with a word cloud generator (See figure 2). Thereafter follows an analysis presented through thematic categories that derived from open coding: hyper gender (binary), sexualized gender (binary), androgynous gender (non-binary) and non-binary gender (non-binary). Instead of showing the analysis according to the gender binary and thereby following the norm, this analysis is presented by the degree of gender self-presentations. As this study explores to what extent gender is expressed. This study has in essence adapted Goffman’s (1976) theory of gender display, Goffman’s (1956) performance of the self and Serano’s (2007) concept of passing to analyse the visual aspects of gender performance in the self-presentations of transgender people on the hashtag #TransIsBeautiful on Instagram. The findings show that the self-presentations of transgender people represented various ways of binary and non-binary gender and therefore different ways of coping with the gender binary norm.

7.1 Hashtag Gender Representation

Hashtags in the Instagram posts are analysed to determine the gender(s) someone identifies with, or wishes to represent oneself through. Most people use #transgender in their post next to #TransIsBeautiful. When this specific hashtag was not used, people use different terms to represent themselves as transgender, such as #trans #tgirl #tranny #transboy #transdude #transgenderwoman #femaletomale #transgenderman #maletomale #ftm #mtf. Figure 2 shows an overview of the frequency of particular hashtags used together with #TransIsBeautiful. The sample consists mainly of pictures of transgender people who identify themselves as transgender woman rather than transgender man or non-binary transgender people. Also there are transgender people who identify themselves neither with male nor female gender terms, using hashtags such as non-binary, queer and genderfluid or androgynous. These terms fall under the transgender umbrella, but these people may not identify themselves explicitly as transgender, or do not wish to represent themselves as such.
in the post. A combination of gender binary and non-binary also occurred, where people identify themselves as a transgender man or transgender woman, but also identify themselves with non-binary, queer and/or genderfluid. The diverse presence and use of multiple gender identities may suggest a multiplicity of gender representations, in how transgender people identify and also may express themselves.

**Figure 2. Hashtag usage in addition to #TransIsBeautiful**

In my analysis, qualitative content analysis was used to gain a deep understanding of how transgender people express their gender the way they do and what kind of content they produce. I identified four types of gender representations, when it comes to individual self-presentations, which are: hyper gender (binary), sexualised gender (binary), androgynous gender (non-binary) and non-binary gender (non-binary). Using the concept of passing by Serano (2007), each of those gender representations can be understood as a way of getting accepted by an individual imagined audience. To explain with a hermeneutic interpretation, what I mean by an individual imagined audience is that none of those gender representations are necessarily trying to pass in front of the wider public. As we know that transgender people suffer a high societal risk on discrimination, harassment and violence, and hence, the hashtag #TransIsBeautiful is constituted by a resistance and aim for a social change against this intolerance. However, that does not mean that the transgender people who enact different gender representations through the hashtag #TransIsBeautiful do not search for a form of passing in front of the public audience. This form of passing however, as I said before, is limited to the public audience which is of interest of each of the represented gender types. This will be further explained below.
7.2 Binary Gender

7.2.1 Hyper Gender

In the findings of this study, a majority of self-presentations are identified as hyper masculine and hyper feminine. These gender self-presentations express a hyper, or in other words, an exaggeration of stereotypical masculine or feminine aspects.

In particular, in the case of hyper gender representations, I assume that the people who depict themselves according to the aspects of what we understand as feminine or masculine, that they aim at passing in front of the public audience, which so far does not allow any other gender representations than either feminine or masculine. Therefore, their public audience, or their imagined audience is a society where female and male are still the prevailing norms of what gender should be. However, the mere fact of these hyper gender self-presentations made through the hashtag, shows also a way of resistance against these widely accepted ideas of how a female or male should be (Goffman, 1979, p. vii).

Transgender men, for example, express themselves with various typical masculine aspects, such as short hair, facial hair, body hair, muscles and broad shoulders. These are consistent with the gender ideas of Goffman (1979) and Kang (1997). See figure 3.

Departing from Goffman’s category on ‘ritualization of subordination’ referring to the body’s position and posture, their gender performance represents the stereotypical idea of a powerful, independent and strong male, as they have an overall straight posture while standing, together with a direct gaze to the viewer and look assertive. This goes in line with Goffman’s category ‘licensed withdrawal’ of facial posture and gaze, where women look away from the viewer and men look at the viewer.

Thereby, these transgender men do not self-touch themselves in their self-presentation, which would indicate weakness and vulnerability, and therefore femininity, according to Goffman (1979, p. 29-31). Furthermore, in these gender self-presentations, transgender men are mainly not wearing clothing. These pictures are genuine self-expressions of sharing their transition and progress thus far, presenting their naked bodies with the emphasis placed on their muscles, mostly shoulders, arms and stomach. Transgender men who do wear clothing, are dressed with sleeveless shirts, also showing their muscular arms and shoulders. See figure 3.
These kinds of self-presentations of transgender men with an exaggerated expression of masculinity, which occurs in general, suggest an importance of a certain need to express masculinity. Perhaps this way of expressing the self is necessary due to the complexity of passing. For transgender people it might be more relevant to conform to societal norms, as either way the audience will judge their appearance. And by passing, they may experience “conditional cissexual privilege” (Serano, 2007, p. 295), which may be a desire, as they would overcome the obstacles they meet on a daily basis as a transgender who does not get recognised by society. In that case, they would obtain the benefits of a cisgender quality of life, as they would stand out less as a transgender.

Figure 3. Example hyper gender (masculine)

Similarly, there are also many pictures of hyper feminine gender representations. In these pictures, femininity manifests itself evident and also in a rather exaggerated form, as these transgender women have long hair, a revealing cleavage, heavy usage of makeup and are sparsely dressed. Most of them wear a dress, but this is mainly of short size by reaching just below the bottom. Thereby, these self-presentations of transgender women are align with the feminine categories of Goffman (1979, p. 45). In their self-presentations, they mostly have an imbalance posture, where they are canting their head, bending a knee or other body parts, presenting the body off balance. See figure 4. Often, they are also in a laying down body position.

Furthermore, they also look away from the camera, making the viewer the one who watches them, instead of the other way around. These self-presentations may suggest the stereotypical idea of women being passive and submissive, which follows the findings of Goffman (1979, p. 41) and Kapidzic and Herring (2011, p. 45). In addition, self-touch is often present in these performances, where an individual touches her face, hair or body in a delicate and soft way.
(Goffman, 1976 pp. 29-31). See figure 4. This also presents femininity as being fragile (Doring et al., 2016, p. 961). These findings show that despite Goffman’s study was conducted in 1979, it shows a similar clear contrast between the gender representations of men and women. Many years later also transgender women represent themselves as passive and vulnerable, and therefore dependent of men. In the case of transgender people this shows a need to pass, which reinforces hereby the societal ideas of how we understand femininity.

Figure 4. Examples of hyper gender feminine (left), imbalance posture by canted head and bended knee (middle) and feminine self-touch (right)

The majority of the significant findings in this study were for gender representations that are constructed as overtly feminine. Female expressions of touching one’s hair and delicate self-touch were consistent with Goffman’s (1976) study of gender display in print advertisements, as well as Kang’s (1997) findings regarding gender representations of feminine touch in magazines. These self-presentations suggest that a societal norm on femininity has not changed over the years, and women are still depicted as submissive and fragile. These self-presentations therefore show that various ways of gender expression are constrained, making ‘to pass’ the norm. Living up to societal gender binary norms, let transgender people be considered as a ‘natural’ member of the identified sex (Serano, 2007, p. 51.). In addition, it gives them the associated privileges of cisgender people, as mentioned earlier. Thereby, by expressing yourself as hyper feminine, transgender people may have less risk to be judged as false, deceiving or infiltrating. However, this would actually mean that transgender people should live stealth, by not making clear that they are transgender, while transgender people on this hashtag do clarify that they are transgender (Serano, 2007, p. 309, 312). These kinds of gender expressions may suggest that you cannot ‘see’ if someone is transgender and that
being transgender is just a way of being yourself, and is not much different than cisgender people. On the other hand, it may suggest that this is how transgender people should be, that they should conform to societal gender binary norms.

**Emphasis on The Face**

In the findings, a particular emphasis on certain body parts is noteworthy, such as the face and chest. This will be further explained below.

In certain pictures, individual transgender men share a close up of their face to emphasize their facial hair. See figure 5. This type of hair on the body is considered as masculine, according to Nagoshi (2013, pp. 52-53). In most cases these pictures contain a before and after photo. This kind of self-presentations suggests the desire or drive to share their transition to show how much they have changed since they started using testosterone hormones, or rather how masculine they have become, by expressing this evident masculinity with facial hair growth.

![Figure 5. Examples of emphasis on face (masculine)](image)

Opposite to that are transgender women wearing evident makeup, such as red lipstick, eyeshadow and mascara. Wearing makeup is a way for transgender women to express themselves as feminine, and therefore to express that they conform to societal gender norms, as cosmetics may exaggerate sex differences in the facial contrast between women and men. See figure 6.

Therefore Goffman might argue, that they could create an impression to others that corresponds with their gender identity (Goffman, 1956, p. 31), by presenting a specific societal role intentionally or unintentionally (Goffman, 1956, p.2), that corresponds with the
gender norms. As a result of conveying people that they follow the societal norms, the individual “possesses certain social [aspects]” and therefore have “a moral right to expect that others will value and treat him in a correspondingly appropriate way” (Goffman, 1956, p. 6). As a result, these individuals would pass and experience cissexual privilege (Serano, 2007, p. 295). The result of this possession of societal gender norms is that transgender people get the same privileges as cisgender people, and may face a lower risk on harassment and such (Serano, 2007), as being seen as a cisgender means that they will be treated in an appropriated way, as Goffman says.

Figure 6. Emphasis on the face (feminine)

**Emphasis on The Chest**

For transgender people who transition from ‘male to female’ or ‘female to male’, breasts are an aspect to consider changing to adapt gender specific aspects. As breasts are secondary sex aspects, they distinguish women from men. The research sample shows pictures with a major emphasis on breasts, representing their femininity or masculinity. Transgender men, for example, emphasize their masculinity by sharing the results of top surgery by expressing their scars along with revealing their muscles. See figure 7. Top surgery, also known as ‘chest reconstruction surgery’, is the removal of breasts with the aim for transgender men to feel more comfortable in their bodies and the dysphoria they feel becomes less or even disappears (see appendix I for gender terminology). To express these scars, transgender men are mostly sparsely dressed.

Departing from Goffman’s theory on the presentation of the self, and in particular, his ideas on various ways of expressing on the frontstage, top surgery may suggest a form of
‘idealisation’ (Goffman, 1956, p. 26), because pictures only show the end result, such as fading or faded scars. In the sample, there are almost no posts containing pictures of before and/or post-surgery. See figure 7. This may indicate that they are phases, which were necessary to do for the frontstage, but are disturbing, therefore we would rather keep them backstage as they are “physically unclean, semi-illegal, cruel, and degrading in other ways” (Goffman, 1956, p.28). Despite the few pictures that actually do present this, the breasts are concealed. Therefore Goffman might argue that these hidden breasts are a form of ‘idealisation’ (1956, p. 26). These self-presentations give the impression that this is the immediate result after surgery by hiding the origin of the surgery by not sharing what occurs ‘backstage’ (Goffman, 1956, p. 27). As a result, in perhaps an attempt to obtain acceptance, these self-presentations reaffirm societal gender norms by expressing how men should appear according to society, by expressing to not have breasts, they express how men should appear (Goffman, 1956, p. 26).

Comparatively, transgender women who put a major emphasis on their breasts also appear regularly in the research sample. They often emphasize their cleavage with other feminine aspects, such as an evident usage of makeup and being sparsely and tightly dressed. See figure 8. These self-presentations suggest a gender expression to conform to their femininity as a transgender woman, and therefore to convey the impression they want others to have (Goffman, 1956, p.2). In this case, it could be interpreted as a way to pass in front of the audience as a natural member according to societal gender norms (Serano, 2007). As Goffman (1956) noted, during this kind of self-presentation of ‘dramatic realization’ (p. 21), the individual “dramatically highlight and portray confirmatory facts” which otherwise
stay unnoticed (Goffman, 1956, p. 19). As they exaggeratedly express aspects, which are considered as stereotypical feminine, this would convince others of their femininity and therefore they would pass as a cisgender women. As mentioned before, by these forms of hyper emphasis on certain gender aspects, transgender people express in a way that this is how transgender people should be, but at the same time it also expressed that they are not that different from cisgender people and should be treated the same way, as they are just being themselves.

Figure 8. Emphasis on chest (feminine)

To conclude, these hyper self-presentations of transgender women and men emphasises their masculine and feminine appearances. This creates the idea that certain appearances are fixed attributes for transgender people (Goffman, 1956, p.14) and appear as natural (Goffman, 1956, p. 14), such as breasts for transgender women and not having breasts for transmen. In addition, they would pass as a cisgender, conveying as a natural member of a sex (Serano, 2007). This follows the idea of Siebler (2012) that a masculine transgender needs to have chest reconstruction surgery and feminine transgender must have chest augmentation, as their bodies are discussed, portrayed, and regulated on the Internet. In addition, that hormones are a standard usage to fulfil the ideal masculine and feminine bodies according to societal norms.

As a result, transgender people may feel pressure to completely ‘correct’ their bodies through hormones or surgery, to prove that they actually belong to the opposite gender norm, as this is expressed by other transgender people on the virtual world, by expressing these clearly evident aspects of masculinity and femininity.
These gender expressions may suggest that ‘to pass’ as a female or male is how transgender people should be. Together with the knowledge of passing’s double standard, that life becomes easier for transgender people when you are considered as a natural member of your identified sex (Serano, 2007, p. 341).

### 7.2.2 Sexualised Gender

Although transgender people tend to express exaggerated masculine and feminine aspects, there are also transgender women who express themselves more exaggeratedly by self-sexualizing themselves. These pictures are another example of sharing notable stereotypical ideas of masculinity and femininity. Transgender women that present themselves as sexually appealing are identified with the same feminine categories as mentioned earlier with hyper feminine: long hair, revealing cleavage, sparsely and tightly dressed, and evident usage of makeup. To explain, they are sparsely dressed by wearing lingerie with an imbalanced posture through a bent knee or head (Goffman, 1979, p. 45). See figure 9. Women often have a subordinate position in relation to men through their position, posture or gaze. For example, women are presented more often than men in a laying position on a bed conveying them as submissive and dependent (Goffman, 1979, p.41). Goffman might argue that this is a “conventionalized expression of sexual availability” (p.41), following how pornography expresses the sexuality of women by presenting them in this powerless position towards men. See figure 9.

*Figure 9. Examples of sexualised gender (feminine).*

Furthermore, the feminine self-touch, whereby one is touching their face or body with their
hands in a gentle way, was often used in these pictures of transgender women, which expresses fragility and preciousness (Goffman, 1979, pp. 29-31). See figure 9.

On the contrary, it is rare to find pictures of transgender men being presented in this way. They appear as sexual attractive by a seductive gaze, looking direct into the viewer and a revealing upper naked body with muscles.

When it comes to this category of gender representations, the sexualised gender binary, who expresses themselves as strongly sexual attractive and appealing, we might assume that they aim at reaching a public audience to conform these ideal ideas of sexual attractiveness of bodies and people in themselves. Align with Kapidzic & Herring (2011) this way of self-presentation reflects sexualised media portrayals, which can also be seen in Goffman’s study on advertisements, in which women are often portrayed in a rather powerless position than men, as was further explained above. These self-presentations may indicate a general desire to present yourself as sexual, as it correlates with previous researchers (Kapidzic & Herring, 2011; Ringrose, 2011; Siibak, 2009), where young females and males present themselves as sexually attractive with the intention to gain popularity. Understood by Serano (2007, p. 311), in this case, with a judging public audience, the intention would be to pass by conforming to the societal ideas of sexual attractiveness.

Therefore these appearances outline a sexualized ideal self-presentation, based on gender binary norms, and thereby express how transgender women and men should represent themselves to meet the expectations of what is considered as sexually attractive by society. Thereby it may also be a deliberate way to show that transgender people can also be as sexual attractive as cisgender people, as they live up to the societal expectations on being a sexual attractive male or female and would therefore experience a form of cissexual privilege (Serano, 2007, p. 295).

However, it is not clear whether these pictures are done intentionally. Through the internalization of media images, it may suggest that this was most probably done unconsciously as we continuously imitate each other, the media and vice versa, according to Butler (1990, p. 33).
7.3 Non-Binary Gender

In complete contrast to gender binary self-presentations of hyper gender and sexualised gender, the research sample contained also of transgender people that express themselves as non-binary. There a many different gender identities in the gender spectrum for people who identify themselves as non-binary. For example, by being within the gender binary, as androgynous, or without as non-binary. As this analysis focuses only on gender expression and not gender identity, it will use these two terms as a way to identify various ways of expression.

It is important to note, that the difference between these two ways of expression is through their assigned hashtags, used as a guideline to categorising the different posts as either women, men or such, as it is not evident through their gender expression. A non-binary expression are transgender people who identify themselves with gender identities such as non-binary, genderfluid and queer, while with androgynous, transgender people express themselves as transgender, but not specifically as either transgender man or transgender women. In contrast, this is rather evident within hyper gender expressions, as previously mentioned.

7.3.1 Androgynous Gender

First, it is important to determine that androgynous in this case focuses only on gender expression, and not gender identity, as you can also feel androgynous, the internal sense of oneself (Vishnani, 2016). When someone is androgynous, you are “partly male, partly female in appearance; or indeterminate (see appendix I for terminology). Through the clear absence or mixture of stereotypical masculine and/or feminine aspects, it is not observable to determine their ways of gender expression to categories of the gender binary, understood by Goffman. Therefore, the fact that androgynous self-presentations do not fall into the Goffman’s categories of feminine or masculine aspects is an important finding for my study. In these gender expressions, transgender people do not pass in a traditional way according to societal gender norms, as they do not feel to live up to these standards (Serano, 2007).

Moreover, this shows that the gender binary is a social construction and put this model into question. As these self-presentations show that certain aspects in ways of expressing yourself, does not sort you ‘naturally’ into either ‘male’ or ‘female’. Such as, a certain distinction between men’s and women’s clothing and/or different kinds of body. I understood that at the beginning, I attempted to still find a way to identify those self-presentations into one of the
gender binary. However, seeing that it takes a strong effort, I understood that any kind of binary interpretations of those self-presentations means a force act. Therefore, as a researcher, I will not put the theoretical framework on this kind of data, as I would thereby skew the data and force a theoretical framework on my data, without having empirical evidence for it. As a result, I would then neglect one of the most important findings in this study, which is that transgender representations can also fall strongly out or within of the gender binary, which questions this norm, showing that the two-sex model is a social construction. These findings will be further explained below.

In particular, while most transgender representations clearly express either masculine or feminine aspects, there are ones which express a not evident or rather absence usage of gender aspects, such as through hair, clothing, body position and posture. From a visual point of view, the hashtag(s) used in these self-presentations show with which gender identity they identify with, rather than how they express themselves visually. However, this was not always explicitly, for example through #transgenderman or #tgirl, but rather through hashtags which suggest it, such as #testosterone or #girlslikeus.

Figure 10. Examples of androgynous gender

Transgender people who express themselves in a rather minimized way, do not evidently represent gender aspects. For example, looking at the research sample, they often wear loose clothing, and therefore do not put an emphasis to expose their chest, as mentioned before in hyper gender expression, the evident presence or absence of breasts determines someone’s femaleness or maleness. Also a certain style or length of hair does not inherently define masculinity or femininity, but rather defines who we are and how we feel.
Transgender people who express themselves androgynous and/or minimized have different styles and length of hair, such as short and long hair. See figure 10. Thereby their posture is mostly a neutral straight standing one, with no evident usage of certain gender gestures, by hands or gaze in their posture.

There are also transgender women (identified by their assigned hashtag) who do not wear or have unnoticeable make up. However, not wearing makeup is actually non-masculine and also non-feminine, as we apply this on ourselves, and therefore a neutral aspect of gender. See figure 10.

These self-presentations may suggest that these transgender people do not have the desire to exaggeratedly express a certain gender identity, and rather choose for a more modest and androgynous way of expressing gender. Moreover, this may suggest that they do not feel the pressure to conform to certain societal gender norms to pass.

In addition, there are transgender people who express themselves androgynous with very evident masculine and feminine aspects, by expressing these aspects rather exaggerated. For example, there is an individual with an evident beard, which is considered as masculine, but also wears very evident make up which is considered as feminine. See figure 11.

Furthermore, there are transgender people who identify themselves with a particular masculine or feminine gender identity through a hashtag, but visually express the opposite gender binary. For example, an individual identifies himself as a transgender man, but his self-presentation expresses feminine aspects, such as long hair, makeup, breasts, dress, high heels and stockings. This may suggest that the individual is challenging the public audience about gender identities by not conforming to the general understanding of how a male or female should be. At the same time, this questions the concept of passing, showing that you
do not necessarily have to be and express only one sex of the gender binary. See figure 12. In particular, these not evident or rather absent usage of gender aspects may suggest that they are chosen consciously or unconsciously to not suggest any visible and/or an easy way of putting the individual into one of the categories of the gender binary. Which also may suggest that they do not feel the pressure to conform to societal gender norms, as they do not evidently express gender aspects. However, Goffman might argue, that these self-presentations can be seen through others as false or ambiguous (Goffman, 1956, p.38). Or even as deceiving or infiltrating (Serano, 2007). As they do not fulfill the societal gender norms, they could create confusion about the ‘real’ gender identity of the individual, with as a result misrepresentation. As these people do not pass, they may be mistreated by society (Goffman, 1956, p. 38; Feinberg, 2006, p. 205, 207).

In the contrary, by expressing these kind of self-presentations in the hashtag #TransIsBeautiful, it may also suggest a greater diversity to the public audience, which may be transgender people. In that case, it shows that you, as a transgender individual, may not necessarily need to pass by conforming to societal gender norms. And therefore that you can also pass by embracing gender aspects in a more modest and androgynous way. For the public audience this would show how diverse and beautiful transgender people expressions are and that being transgender is not about conforming, which would normalize transgender people who are unwilling or unable to pass.

![Figure 12. Opposite gender expression from assigned gender identities.](image)

### 7.3.2 Non-Binary Gender

At the same time, there are also transgender people who explicitly identify themselves as non-binary, through gender identity hashtags such as non-binary, genderfluid and queer.
Within these self-presentation, these three various gender terms mostly occurred together, and therefore questioning the meaning of gender identities through their contradiction. Occasionally the term androgynous and non-conforming were also used (see appendix I for gender terminology). The various non-binary genders are all genders identities that do not fit into the binary of either male or female.

Transgender people who identify themselves as non-binary, queer and/or genderfluid appear to express themselves in different ways, but are similar with androgynous expressions mentioned earlier, as some emphasize masculine and/or feminine aspects and some do not emphasize this at all. See figure 13. For example, some self-presentations do not contain an evident appearance of breasts, make up, muscles and/or other gender aspects. Next to that, there are also non-binary self-presentations where masculine and feminine aspects are exaggerated. For example, an individual with heavy evident usage of makeup, a very short dress, feminine touch by touching the body gently, evident muscles and body hair, such as short hair and a beard. Departing from Feinberg’s (2006) idea on passing, these gender representations are the opposite of what she argues, namely that “the essence of [transgenderism] is the act of passing” (p. 232), and therefore that transgender people need to follow the gender binary and express themselves according to these societal norms. Thereby, these findings also differ from Feinberg’s idea that there is no middle ground (2006 p. 205), and that ‘doing’ transgender is only a process of what she calls, the reproduction of gender stereotypes, according to Spade (2006, pp. 315-332). The findings show that there are transgender people who challenge the gender binary, by embracing masculine and feminine
aspects in an open, androgynous and exaggerated way, and at the same time identify themselves with gender identities outside and within the gender binary.

Figure 14. Activist androgynous appearance

Furthermore, most self-presentations do not show if the individual is doing this deliberately, but some are portraying an androgynous or non-binary appearance, in response to the prevailing gender norms with a rebellious (activist) attitude, according to their attached hashtag and message expressed in their self-presentation. These transgender people deliberately share self-presentations to question the societal gender norms, see figure 14. According to societal gender norms, they do not pass as a natural member (Serano, 2007). They emphasize that the expression of gender norms do not represent an individual and that we need to look beyond them. These self-presentations are important to change the ideas about gender identities and to create an active awareness about that gender is a social construction (Oberst et al., 2015). Important to point out is, that this did not appear among hyper gender representations. This may suggest that transgender people who express themselves in a hyper gender way, prefer to follow societal gender norms and therefore have the desire to pass and not protest. Although, the wider context of the hashtag #TransIsBeautiful aims for social change of the normalisation of gender diversity and a greater understanding of gender and therefore also transgender people. The way in which gender is represented by transgender people may try to suggest a form of normalisation, or in other words, that those gender representations might try to make the audience relate to the individual on the frontstage. And maybe seeing that this individual might be anyone, and not necessarily an exaggerated feminine female or masculine male, by not having evident gender aspects, such as not wearing evident makeup or muscles, or even by having partly female and male aspects in their appearance. Moreover, that you do not necessarily need to pass.
Thereby, there are of course also transgender people who may deliberately express themselves exaggerated androgynous to also challenge the audience’s idea on gender, as the findings show.

Departing from Goffman’s theory of gender display, he might argue that these non-binary gender representations are “only a schedule for the portrayal of gender” (Goffman, 1979, p.8), as these transgender people are aware of the social construction of gender and reject to conform to any kind of gender identity, by also identifying themselves with various non-binary gender identities.

The gender binary falls strongly in Goffman’s categories. However, the androgynous and non-binary gender representations fall out of this pattern and I argue that they represent an important particular of a maybe new form of gender representation that tries to detach itself from stereotypical feminine and masculine aspects, and therefore to pass. Moreover, they may question gender binary representations, as it shows a more diverse gender spectrum of expressing yourself, which goes beyond the strict division of societal gender norms that reinforces a divide between male and female bodies.

Altogether, the performances of transgender people in the analysis show a great diversity of gender expressions towards the norm, showing two different ways of coping with the gender binary. In some self-presentations, transgender people rather emphasize masculine and/or feminine aspects, attempting to ‘pass’ through a stereotypical gender self-presentation, and some rather minimize or do not emphasize these gender binary aspects at all. The latter therefore, does not follow the societal gender norms of how we expect men of women to appear and behave in society. This is an important result as it shows that the gender self-presentations of transgender people can be rather diverse from each other, showing the social construction of gender.
8. Discussion

8.1 Answering the Research Questions

My aim of this study was to explore the gender self-presentations of transgender people and the impact of ‘passing’ on #TransIsBeautiful on Instagram. #TransIsBeautiful aims to change the ways people treat and see transgender and celebrate gender diversity.

To explore this, I asked the following two research questions: (RQ1) ‘How do transgender people present gender on the hashtag #TransIsBeautiful on Instagram?’ and (RQ2) ‘to what extent can a form of ‘passing’ be seen in how transgender people adhere to expressing societal gender norms?’ This study employed a qualitative content analysis to explore the visual content of 346 posts of transgender people on the hashtag. Goffman’s work on gender display (1979) and presentation of the self (1956) and Serano’s concept of passing (2007) guided the analysis.

Results of the analysis showed that #TransIsBeautiful generated various types of gender self-presentations. To begin with, the findings indicated that there are users who were strongly influenced by the gender binary, due to a large amount of gender self-presentations conforming to societal gender norms, representing the gender binary. They showed various noteworthy ways of gender self-presentations of transgender people on #TransIsBeautiful, which underlined the evident contrast between how women and men are represented, elaborated by Goffman (1979). In these kind of self-presentations, transgender people portrayed exaggerated feminine or masculine aspects. This illustrated a comparable representation of masculinity and femininity, seen in previous studies on cisgender people and suggested a strong desire or need to conform to societal ideas of how women and men should be and behave. Moreover, these self-presentations support the ideas of the social construction of gender, according to Beauvoir (1997), Butler (1990), Laqueur (1990) and West & Zimmerman (1978). Namely, that as a transgender woman or transgender man, you are only seen as a ‘natural’ man or woman when you adapt to the prevailing norms of femininity and masculinity. Instead of celebrating gender diversity, these ways of expressing themselves is rather a conformation to prevailing societal gender norms. This suggested that they highlighted these aspects to convey the audience of what they wanted them to see; it is a
desired impression towards the audience, as these self-presentations emphasize the individual’s goal of their appearance and therefore the impression they want to make in their performance (Goffman, 1956, p.21). By sharing notable stereotypical gender aspects of a man or woman, their identity fulfils the collective representation of gender in society (p. 17). In complete contrast, there are transgender people who did not conform to societal gender norms. They challenged the gender binary by non-binary gender self-presentations, being within and outside the gender binary. In their self-presentations, transgender people did not represent evident gender aspects, but rather represented this in a mixed, minimized and/or exaggerated way. These people mostly identified themselves as non-binary, queer, genderfluid and/or androgynous. Transgender people who represented themselves in these ways suggested that they do not have the desire or feel the need to express certain gender aspects, and they also may not feel the pressure to pass by conforming to societal gender norms. Therefore, they rather choose to have a more minimized and androgynous way in their gender expression, challenge the gender binary and prevailing societal identities may have changed.

These kinds of gender self-presentations are highly important. As in contemporary society, there are many misunderstandings about gender. For example, the idea that gender is the same as biological sex, which is either female or male. Gender identities who deviate and who “fail to do their gender right” (Butler, 1990, p.178), may risk to get socially punished outside the online community. Prevailing gender norms thus create confusion and fear when someone’s gender expression is beyond or within the traditional ideas on gender. As a result transgender people suffer of higher rates of discrimination and violence than the overall population (Serano, 2007). The rate of suicide attempts among transgender people is as high as 41 percent (Herman et al., 2014). Therefore, for some transgender people conforming to societal gender norms and thereby to pass, may be a way to overcome these obstacles. As a result, in what may be an attempt to pass and obtain acceptance, these self-presentations reaffirm societal gender norms by expressing how women and men should appear according to society. Reinforcing gender roles may be a way to be accepted and express that transgender people really belong to that gender. As Feinberg noted, the less you stand out as a transgender, the less you will encounter violence, harassment or criticism (p. 205-207). Each of those self-presentations is a way of getting accepted by an individually imagined
audience. These kinds of self-presentations suggested that there are transgender people who feel the pressure or need to conform and pass, in front of the public audience, to societal gender norms of how men and women should be and behave. However, there are also people who may not feel this, and aim to be accepted and/or pass in different ways by their audience. This may put the gender binary model into question as a norm.

All of the various gender self-presentations presented in this study, aimed at contesting the naturalised understanding of gender self-presentations, which causes oppression of gender diversities. However, that does not mean that those protests take place as resistance against any form of acceptance, but they take place as a formulation or an attempt to achieve acceptance from a different kind of audience. Each of the gender self-presentations I extracted from my analysis, showed various audiences that might have been aimed at. The results showed that transgender people express themselves in two ways, when it comes to coping with societal gender norms. One attempts to pass in front of the audience according to societal gender binary norms, and one that falls outside and within these norms.

Goffman’s work showed societal ideas on femininity and masculinity, which are still present in today’s society, according to the analysis. The concept of passing assured that as a researcher I would not only focus blindly on Goffman’s two-sex distinction between male and female and left room to explore gender expressions which were not immediately able to be identified, according to pre-existing theories, such as androgyny.

However, the concept of passing implies a norm, namely a binary one, which is to pass or fail as a cisgender and therefore reinforces societal gender norms. This became problematic in the analysis, as they were transgender people who did not pass according to certain gender aspects in their appearance, but this did not make them a lesser man, woman, or something else. They were just being themselves. It implies that your appearance, or in other words, gender expression, determines at the same time your gender identity, in front of the audience. Moreover, it may suggest that being considered as a cisgender is more important than being a transgender.

According to Serano (2007), transgender people will be judged on their gender expression, whether they do live up to societal gender norms or not. I suggest that the concept of passing could potentially normalize ‘to look’ cisgender as a transgender, rather than to look as your gender identity. Moreover, passing by definition does not explore non-binary, androgynous,
gender queer, and gender fluid people, and it does not insist a diverse representation of transgender people. Therefore, there was data that did not match the analytical model at first. While passing is important for some transgender people, it is important that transgender people are accepted also for not passing as a cisgender, which is the aim of #TransIsBeautiful. According to Heinz (2012), McInroy & Craig (2015), Oberst et al. (2015), O’Neill (2014) and Cassidy (2013), in recent years, the growing acceptance towards the LGBTQ+ community are changing prevailing gender ideas. The internet gives the transgender community more visibility and Instagram plays a significant role as a social media platform to make it possible for transgender people to express, share and support the diversity of this community. Non-binary self-presentations on the hashtag support this shift through more visibility of gender ambiguity. They are highly important to show that there are no limited ways of being transgender, as they break prevailing gender norms of a masculine male or feminine female.

This study aimed to give an idea about what kind of socially learned and social patterns there are on gender and their influences on transgender people ‘doing’ gender. Since gender is the process of creating a dichotomy between men and women, it is often used to emphasize their gender, because society wants this from them. The multiplicity of gender self-presentations under the line of the hashtag is maybe an indicator to assume that transgender is diverse and is building upon societal gender norms that already exist. It tries to contest through a strong representation of those gender binary self-presentations that exist through a very strong distance of any kind of societal representation of female or male or through different aspects. I assume that many more could be found in other online spaces. The way in which any gender representation is expressed is always departing from what already exists, either in exaggerating it or in neglecting it, resisting it, or mixing it, but in any way this is the base for any form of gender representation. Because we, as humans, can never build upon something non-existent. People learn to ‘do’ gender by “looking at others, imitating their behaviour and identifying themselves with it” (Butler, 1990, p. 175, 178-179; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Or as Beauvoir (1997) puts it “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (p. 295). The aim of the hashtag #TransIsBeautiful is to celebrate gender diversity, to which these gender self-presentations partially contributed to, by showing two ways of coping with the
norms. Breaking the gender binary and therefore the prevailing societal gender norms would result in a more fluid view of gender, allowing people to freely choose and express their gender identity in a fluid gender spectrum. After all, it could be a good way to stimulate the representation, visibility and presence of transgender people, which is considered important for promoting the knowledge and acceptance of the transgender community in our society.

8.2 Limitations & Further Research

This study has some limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, the research design has been narrowed down due to the short period of time available to complete a master thesis. Therefore, this study only conducted qualitative content analysis rather than using triangulation, to complement the study with in-depth interviews to collect data about people’s opinions about and motives behind their gender expressions. Furthermore, this qualitative content analysis aimed to show the diversity in gender expressions rather than presenting quantitative numbers about these gender expressions, causing the qualitative research to be of a subjective nature. This choice was made deliberately to portray gender diversity by not following the norm, which is considered as a limitation to this study.

In addition, the theoretical framework of Goffman and Serano did not support the results enough in understanding transgender self-presentations. Their perspectives are based on the two-sex model and associated norms, which put them into question. Fully applying them would have skewed the data and resulted in neglecting important findings. Therefore it is important for future studies to focus on developing theories which go beyond the social construction of the gender binary.

The concept of ‘The Other’ could have been interesting as an added theoretical dimension, because of its connection to passing. Being and looking cisgender is superior to transgender, which is inferior and deviant by societal norms (Haraway, 2004, p. 113). The notion of otherness may have deepened the analysis more in how social identities are contested and how differences are reaffirmed.

Queer theory could also have been a theoretical dimension to further deepen the analysis, as it focuses on the idea that identities are not fixed and do not determine who we are, aiming to normalize the idea of choosing one’s own identity and disrupting the heteronormativity (McCann, 2016). Future studies should continue to explore and challenge societal gender
binary norms, as the findings in this study showed the fluidity of gender expressions among transgender people.

Mass self-communication theory (Castells, 2009) or an equivalent digital media theory could have been interesting as another added theoretical dimension for the analysis, by exploring more in depth how social media should be approached with regard to social movements and what role social media play in facilitating social change and visibility for transgender people. Furthermore, it would also be interesting to explore to what extent transgender people are conscious or subconscious about their performances and what their motives are behind posting self-presentations on the hashtag by conducting in-depth interviews, or as what Goffman (1956) would say, by going backstage. This study was only conducted from my point of view as an audience, in an attempt to make an objective analysis supported by scientific theories. Thereby, a quantitative study may provide further knowledge to measure and understand who likes various types of gender representations, by analysing likes and comments in posts on the hashtag #TransIsBeautiful. And therefore explore how people, or in other words, the audience reacts to transgender self-presentations.

Nevertheless, this study showed that transgender people can choose two different ways of coping with societal gender norms: they can either attempt to pass through these norms or fall outside and within the binary gender. It became evident that it was difficult to apply the theoretical perspectives to understand this. Which putted the gender binary model into question, and raised the need for theories that go beyond the binary construction to successfully understand and normalize the self-presentations of transgender people.
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Appendix I Gender Terminology

The following definitions are almost all directly obtained from Trans Student Educational Resources (2017).

Androgynous: partly male, partly female in appearance; or indeterminate sex (Oxford Dictionary, n.d.).

Cisgender: term for someone who exclusively identifies as their sex assigned at birth. The term cisgender is not indicative of gender expression, sexual orientation, hormonal makeup, physical anatomy, or how one is perceived in daily life.

Gender Binary: A system of viewing gender as consisting solely of two, opposite categories, termed “male and female”, in which no other possibilities for gender or anatomy are believed to exist. This system is oppressive to anyone who defies their sex assigned at birth, but particularly those who are gender-variant or do not fit neatly into one of the two standard categories.

Gender Dysphoria: Anxiety and/or discomfort regarding one’s sex assigned at birth.

Gender Fluid: A changing or “fluid” gender identity.

Gender Identity Disorder / GID: A controversial DSM-III and DSM-IV diagnosis given to transgender and other gender-nonconforming people. Because it labels people as “disordered,” Gender Identity Disorder is often considered offensive. The diagnosis is frequently given to children who don’t conform to expected gender norms in terms of dress, play or behaviour. Such children are often subjected to intense psychotherapy, behaviour modification and/or institutionalization. This term was replaced by the term “gender dysphoria” in the DSM-5.

Non-binary: Preferred umbrella term for all genders other than female/male or woman/man, used as an adjective (e.g. Jesse is a non-binary person). Not all non-binary people identify as
transgender and not all trans people identify as non-binary. Sometimes (and increasingly), non-binary can be used to describe the aesthetic/presentation/expression of a cisgender or transgender person.

Pangender: Pangender people are those who feel they identify as all genders. The term has a great deal of overlap with gender queer. Because of its all-encompassing nature, presentation and pronoun usage varies between different people who identify as pangender (Ok2beme, 2017)

Passing: Being perceived by others as a particular identity/gender or cisgender regardless how the individual in question identifies, e.g. passing as straight, passing as a cis woman, passing as a youth. This term has become controversial as “passing” can imply that one is not genuinely what they are passing as.

Queer: General term for gender and sexual minorities who are not cisgender and/or heterosexual. There is a lot of overlap between queer and [transgender] identities, but not all queer people are [transgender] and not all trans people are queer. The word queer is still sometimes used as a hateful slur, so although it has mostly been reclaimed, be careful with its use.

Stealth: To not be openly transgender in all or almost all social situations.

Transgender: encompassing term of many gender identities of those who do not identify or exclusively identify with their sex assigned at birth. The term transgender is not indicative of gender expression, sexual orientation, hormonal makeup, physical anatomy, or how one is perceived in daily life. Also see: The Gender Unicorn.

Transition: A person’s process of developing and assuming a gender expression to match their gender identity. Transition can include: coming out to one’s family, friends, and/or co-workers; changing one’s name and/or sex on legal documents; hormone therapy; and possibly (though not always) some form of surgery. It’s best not to assume how one transitions as it is different for everyone.
Transsexual: A deprecated term that is often considered pejorative similar to transgender in that it indicates a difference between one’s gender identity and sex assigned at birth. Transsexual often – though not always – implicates hormonal/surgical transition from one binary gender (male or female) to the other. Unlike transgender/trans, transsexual is not an umbrella term, as many transgender people do not identify as transsexual. When speaking/writing about [transgender] people, please avoid the word transsexual unless asked to use it by a transsexual person.

Topsurgery: FTM chest reconstruction surgery, also known as “top surgery,” is a solution for transgender men or non-binary transgender people who wish to achieve a more masculine looking appearance by reducing the size of or removing their breasts.

The ultimate goal of surgery is to make you feel more comfortable with your body by better aligning your physical characteristics with your internal sense of self and the self you want to present to the world. The relief surgery provides can enhance both your feelings of self-esteem and body confidence (Gender Confirmation Center, n.d.).

Queer: A term for people of marginalized gender identities and sexual orientations who are not cisgender and/or heterosexual. This term has a complicated history as a reclaimed slur.
Appendix II Coding Scheme

Guidelines for coding during the content analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CODING SCHEME</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>0/ gender (by hashtag)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transgender woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transgender man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-binary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender fluid</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Androgynous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drag</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1/ gender</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>masculine: short hair, facial hair, body hair, muscles and broad shoulders. Clothes they wear were tank tops, sleeveless shirts, t-shirts, hats or in some cases were even being shirtless.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feminine: long hair, a revealing cleavage, are sparsely and tighter dressed by dresses, skirts and lingerie, heavy usage of makeup and accessories such as jewellery and high heels.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>androgynous or non-binary: mixture/exaggeration/no evident aspects of masculinity and/or femininity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2/ body posture (straight/imbalance)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>men: (straight posture) upright positions, looking prepared and assertive,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>women: (imbalance posture) canting postures of knee or head, off balance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>androgynous or non-binary: mixture/exaggeration/no evident aspects of masculinity and/or femininity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3/ body position: (standing/sitting/lying)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>women: lying down (passive and powerless, submission, sexual availability) (the watched)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>men: standing. (face down and eyes trained upward from below) (the watcher)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>androgynous or non-binary: mixture/exaggeration/no evident aspects of masculinity and/or femininity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4/ self-touch: (no touching/self-touch)</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>women: touching/holding themselves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>men: no touch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>androgynous or non-binary: mixture/exaggeration/no evident aspects of masculinity and/or femininity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 5/ gaze: (direct/withdrawal) | men: direct gaze, looking at viewer  
women: withdrawal gaze, looking way from viewer  
androgynous or non-binary: mixture/exaggeration/no evident aspects of masculinity and/or femininity |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6/ clothing:</td>
<td>(full clothing/sparse clothing/suggestive clothing (lingerie/bathing suit)/naked)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 7/ face: (facial hair/makeup) | men: facial hair  
women: makeup  
androgynous or non-binary: mixture/exaggeration/no evident aspects of masculinity and/or femininity |
| 8/ breasts: (not a focal point, somewhat emphasized, major focus) | women: focus on breasts  
men: focus on no more breasts  
revealing body parts - increase of objectification and sexualisation  
androgynous or non-binary: mixture/exaggeration/no evident aspects of masculinity and/or femininity |
| 9/ sexual attractiveness: | women: seductive gaze, eyes looking up or sideways of the viewer.  
clothing: revealing cleavage  
posture: head tilted, body angled  
men: seductive gaze: looking straight at the viewer (seductive manner) looking away in distance, looking down at the viewer.  
clothing: showing naked upper body  
posture: straight  
androgynous or non-binary: mixture/exaggeration/no evident aspects of masculinity and/or femininity |