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Self-Shooting Uterus-Owners: Examining the Selfies of Pregnant Transmen within the Politics of Human Reproduction

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ABSTRACT

This work examines how transmen pregnancy is found within the discourse of moralizing and pathologizing reproductive health. Moralization criticizes the “artificial” character of transpregnancy, and pathologization sees transpregnancy as rather “abnormal”. This work analyses these discursive contentions with case of the increasing public visibility of pregnant transmen through selfies. A commonplace reading of these transpregnant selfies can be, on the one hand, extended forms of othering or, on the other hand, emancipation from moralization and pathologization. However, this work argues that the visual display of transpregnant bodies is neither a form of othering nor gaining recognition but rather a suspension to moralization and pathologization of trans-identities. Transmen pregnancy has the character of both disrupting the concept of pregnancy-as-usual and at the same time evokes a very familiar experience of human reproduction. This thus gives transpregnant selfies their liminal character of both abnormal and normal at the same time. Given that transpregnancy is still a new subject for philosophical inquiry, this work hopes to contribute to the literature by surfacing some of transpregnancy’s ethical dimensions when juxtaposed in the cyberspace.

KEYWORDS

transpregnancy, transman, selfie, moralization, pathologization, transbody

Human Reproduction in the Digital Public Spectacle

A pregnant body is found under the public's constant monitoring, and is "by no means a private matter" (Hanson, 2004). With the gaze of the public eye, the pregnant body serves as a "text of culture... [and] practical, direct locus of social control" (Bordo, 1989), with a temporary identity that co-exists with a multiplicity of other identities in a single person, which are experienced simultaneously and are jointly constitutive. As such, while pregnancy is a biological process that is ascribed to the female sex and even to a gender role and performance (Kang, 1997), deviations from this expectation is evident such as in the case of transpregnancy. Pregnant trans people¹ are under special gaze of the public because they are considered as a transgressor of nature who deviate from reproductive norms such as "natural" female pregnancy (Lindner et al., 2012). In the age of the digital media, transpregnancy has even become more public than it has ever been. For one, the digital media is of particular interest for transpregnancy as they are both criticized for being "unreal"; the former being filtered/edited, and the latter being a modification of natural biological features. But more importantly, unlike the limited discussions in LGBT community forums, the academe, or non-government organizations, transpregnancy as content has expanded through social media sites, which has implications on how the body operates in a wider range of public. However, little attention has been given to the examination of the link between transbodies in the cyberspace.

This work examines transpregnancy under a specific form of digital media – the selfie. Within the online realm, the selfie "ha[s] changed... public behavior. It's become a new visual genre" (Saltz, 2014). With the pervasive use of smartphones with cameras, "extensive taking of self-portrait photographs has become a global phenomenon" (Duggan, 2015), which "has shifted from third person professional authors and editors towards the first-person authors of the selfie" (Čuš Babič et. al., 2018, p. 2). While not as many as photos compared to online news, selfies from pregnant transmen² are surfacing in social media such as Instagram, Pinterest, Twitter and Tumblr with #transpregnancy or #pregnancy for all as the main hashtags for such posts. Taking a selfie as one of the main means of sharing images online has become popular in pregnancy documentations, mommy blogging and other social media activities including transpregnancies. It is within this context that this work investigates on how transpregnant selfies reveal how the body can be "known, understood and experienced through images" (Coleman, 2008, p. 168).

This work also sees the relevance of analyzing transpregnancies as manifested in selfies for this dynamic it offers a window to see the connection

¹ The use of the term "trans" both refer to trans sexual and transgender people; the former refers to those that had undergone sexual reassignment surgery and the latter are those that practice gender-based transitions (Skidmore, 2011).

² Individuals who identify as men but were assigned female sex at birth.

between two ventures that seem to be under tension, though not necessarily incompatible – (1) self-expression and recognition, and (2) extended objectification. Posting transpregnant selfies can serve as an emancipatory activity of expressing one’s identity (Kozinets et al., 2017; Marwick, 2010; Schwarz, 2015) but at the same time it may also mean placing oneself under the objectifying gaze of the digital public (Lindner et al., 2012). What complicates selfies as means of either self-expression or objectification is its personal character. Note that unlike images from news shot by professionals, selfies are taken by the transpregnant persons themselves, which is a personal and voluntary act. A selfie is not just an ordinary “self-portrait photograph of oneself (or of oneself and other people)”; it has a personal effort of being “taken with a camera or a camera phone held at arm’s length or pointed at a mirror, which is usually shared through social media” (Sorokowski et al., 2015, p. 124).

Since selfies involve “control over the final look of portrait photographs, at least on social media” (Čuš Babič et. al., 2018, p. 2), it raises the question whether or not this seeming “control” is a sign of empowerment or further self-policing. As a response to the gap in the literature that frames transpregnancy as falling into the category of either only objectification or only emancipation, this study argues for the need to analyze the dynamics of the selfie’s double-edged character. An analysis of either only the objectifying or emancipating character of selfies is rather limited since selfies operate under the dynamic culture of sharing, following, reacting and commenting as facilitated by the online environment. This work therefore asks what is the selfie’s place in the struggle for trans-identity expression in the context of a constant digital public scrutiny. In theoretical terms, the contribution of this analysis rests on its attempt to regard the transbody as a venue of the interplay between the transbody and the digital media. The text is structured in such manner: (1) classic moralizing and pathologizing tendencies to objectify the transbody; (2) objectifying and emancipatory potentials of transpregnancy through selfies; (3) synthesizing the two interpretations through analyzing the implications of the presence of pregnant transmen selfies on social media.

Unnatural and Abnormal: Classic Discourses on Transbody

Reproductive health is not new to moral and pathological imperatives, the former pertains to viewing actions into the categories of good and evil rather than merely unpleasant, impractical or senseless (Skitka et al., 2018; Rozin, 1999), and the latter being a process of viewing subjects as psychological issues (Stritzke & Scaramuzza, 2016). Morality and pathology are interconnected such that both feed discourse of seeing natural processes as being an exceptionally well-suited domain for everyone to adhere to. As such, framing “natural” as desirable makes the case for both moral and pathologization of any condition that deviates from what is deemed as natural. For instance, pregnancy out of wedlock is moralized as ethically undesirable and pathologized as mental health problems to maintain monogamy. Another example is the age of getting pregnant, which

has a set of moral acceptability, and when someone failed to comply can be seen as aggression. Who gets pregnant by whom is also taken as a moral and pathological issue especially in the context of incest and professionalism (i.e. teacher-student issue).

In the case of transpregnancy, the concept of the “natural” is very pertinent as trans people are usually described as “[a]nything that disrupts, denaturalizes, rearticulates, and makes visible the normative linkages... between the biological specificity of the sexually differentiated human body, the social roles and statuses that a particular form of body is expected to occupy” (Stryker, 2018, p. 3). With this comes a combined implication of moralization and pathologization to transpregnancy is when it is seen as both wrong and deviant. While moralization and pathologization of transsexualism and transgenderism have not escaped criticisms (i.e. oppressive and controlling), most of these criticisms were raised before the medical field started to talk about the possibility of pregnancy for the trans community. So, while there is greater degree, to which gender diverse people experience social inclusion, in terms of pregnancy, transsexualism and transgenderism has not gone far. Understanding these patterns allows for seeing how emerging social practices can offer insights and contribute to understanding of identities, and their relation to societal constructions of reproduction and gender (Cockerham, 2012). Critical findings in this study will hopefully provide a measure of the magnitude of what has been achieved thus far by surfacing out the often-marginalized voices in the socio-political arena.

Against the Artificial: Moralization of the Transbody

Activities of trans people are of particular interest to moralization because some of trans people’s affairs are ambiguously morally contentious such as changing names and sex identification in their documents. However, when it comes to bodily alterations such as sexual reassignment surgery and taking up hormones, trans people activities can be seen as controversial enough to enter the moralization discourse. This moralization is contained within one side of a natural/unnatural and familiar/strange binary opposition, seeing the natural and familiar as “good” and seeing the unnatural and strange as harmful as with the “invalids,” “defectives,” and “mutants”. This artificiality is not a new issue deeply ingrained in the reproductive health domain. From using contraceptives to fetal surgery and gene editing or “designer babies,” embarking on the artificial sparks ethical concerns. It is therefore not surprising to expect moralization of transpregnancy. As such, being thought of as only possible among females, transpregnancy carries with it an embedded controversy in taking part on something artificial. The literature has not been silent on the issue on artificiality, albeit scarce. The most common research found concerning transsexualism and transgenderism and pregnancy is on surrogacy. In the past decade, the literature has paid attention on the experiences of pregnant transmen. Indeed, the most salient discussions are linked to the artificiality of trans people in themselves, followed by the artificiality of being parents.

Given that trans people have not “permanently changed their social genders without permanently altering their genitals” (Stryker, 2018, p. 123), the issue lies in its “incompatibility” to foster an offspring. This incompatibility can be deemed as undesirable under the discourse that what is unnatural is likely to be threatening and ugly as opposed to what is deemed as natural. Transpregnancy is unnatural not in the sense of not existing, but by being too different and something other than pregnancy-as-usual, therefore a possible harmful situation. Indeed, one of the issues that usually attract moral discourse is related to activities considered as harmful to be not moral (Schein & Gray, 2016). For instance, smoking is a case that had been moralized from being seen as an individual choice to being morally debatable (Rozin, 1999). Much of the moralization of transpregnancy rests on this issue on conflating the unfamiliar as harmful. This also touches the (presumed) issue on some “unnecessary dangers” that trans people practice (i.e. hormones replacement). Put differently, the associated artificiality to the lifestyles of trans people frames trans-identity as unpleasant thereby legitimizing any moral judgment against it. Framing artificiality in terms of incurring risks renders “naturalness” as a well-deserved standard for moralization, which subjects trans-identity against moral norms. Consequently, being viewed as antagonistic to nature comes together with trans people’s “symbolic annihilation” or their lack of representation within the larger public (Gerbner, 1972, p. 43). Through moralization, transpregnancy fulfills a role for the “normal” in confirming themselves as put together and appropriate. When viewed in this context, transpregnancy functions to reinforce categories of normality, in which types of pregnancy seem to be either excluded from or included. That is to say, it facilitates the “othering” of the transpregnant person, as establishing social processes that identify certain categories of people in society as less “normal” than others.

Abnormal Body and Desire: Pathologized Transpregnancy

Transpregnancy is pathologized in terms of being seen as an abnormal fertility situation and desire arising from expectations that trans people cannot reproduce. Observing abnormalities has also been a common sex and gender issue. For instance, wherever possible, surgeries are made available to “correct” cases that are outside the binary norms (e.g. intersexuality) as soon after birth as possible. Trans people who desire to desire and/or become pregnant then are pathologized because their situations are seemingly incompatible with the usual pregnancy processes even though “[n]ew reproductive technologies have particularly challenged our ways of thinking about human reproduction” (Cranny-Francis et al., p. 192 cited in Stritzke & Scaramuzza, 2016). For instance, desiring pregnancy for non-parent transwomen is seen as encounters of “non-innate concepts” or a non-default for transwomen. Framing the non-innate discourse against trans people establishes the norm of an exclusive desire for pregnancy among those who were assigned as females at birth. It normalizes the concept of modifying the body as a legitimate pathological issue. Transpregnancy is not only desired by transwomen,

transmen also decide to retain their uterus, get pregnant, and give birth but their case is also seen as problematic even to the point of “threatening or attempting to remove their children from their care” (Hoffkling, Obedin-Maliver & Sevelius, 2017, p. 12). This relies on pathologizing desires of trans people to be pregnant as deviations from what is “normal”.

As much as transpregnancy is pathologized as an abnormal desire, it is also linked to disability, which has not yet achieved that cultural recognition comparable to other gender-related issues (Garland-Thomson, 1997). Hence, pathologizing transpregnancy promotes a portrayal of trans people as both physically and psychologically inferior. This type of pathologizing can conflict with the goal of psychiatry itself, that is, to foster healthy mental states, as it may appear to do the exact opposite. According to STP, International Campaign Stop Trans Pathologization³, an international activist initiative working for trans depathologization, the practice of pathologizing activities of trans people increases the sources of anxiety or insecurity that the trans-community might have with their identity. Moreover, this framing also comes with pressuring those who have female bodies (reproductive organs and hormones) to have the responsibility of bearing children. So, as it transgresses biological normativity, transpregnancy remains outside the boundaries of moral and mental comfort and expectations. This type of rhetoric, connecting desire and disability, sees transpregnancy as a problematic relationship between trans-identity and health. Transpregnancy then is framed as a health risk, which situates the transbody as unfit to carry out the process of pregnancy compared to a “healthier” female pregnancy. The pathologization gains legitimacy especially when expressed in the form of medical diagnosis.

Amateur Self-Shooters: Transpregnancy Enters the Online World

In bringing the moralizing and pathologizing discourses of transpregnancy to the space of digital media, two main trajectories immediately surface (1) a continued moralization and pathologization take place in a cyber platform; or (2) the digital media offers a means to lessen, if not eradicate, objectification by being a space of self-expression. Indeed, there is reasonable grounds to both claims. On the one hand, studies show that selfie postings and viewings encourage body policing and self-regulation (Jeffreys, 2014), which create higher levels of self-objectification (Lindner, Tantleff-Dunn & Jentsch, 2012), body dissatisfaction, and feeling the need for positive comments (McLean, Paxton, Wertheim & Masters, 2015; Chua & Chang, 2016). But on the other hand, recent research has suggested that posting selfies serves more communicative purposes of self-expression (Schwarz, 2010) or self-embellishment (Marwick, 2015), than mere reifying the neoliberal pathos of narcissism. For instance, Kozinets et al., (2017) suggest that selfie postings are not necessarily self-referential acts of vanity, but rather an innovative means of communicating one’s inner state. Moreover, feeling in control of one’s image is found to be the key for those who take

³ <https://www.stp2012.info/old/en>

selfies feel as though they are in control of their own images. For instance, women posting sexualized selfies on Tumblr felt liberated as they were able to express themselves (Tiidenberg & Cruz, 2015).

However, this work considers the case of transpregnant selfies a manifestation of trans-identity agency that veers away from the binary interpretation of being either othering or empowering. This work argues that selfies of transcend this dichotomy by having a unifying character of both normal and abnormal at the same time. Within a digital space that sets a range of what is “normal, natural and inevitable” (Gill, 2007, p. 114), the selfies of transpregnant bodies serve as a pinch point where personal meanings converge with both the normative and deviant. Because of a personal and amateur character, the transpregnant’s images reflect what Barthes (1981) call the “punctum” or the subtle properties of an image that are provoking, vexing and “piercing” on both the normal and abnormal character of transpregnancy.

Beyond Othering as Experience

Due to the popularity of activism and advocacy in the cyberspace, it is no wonder to read a compilation of analytical clichés about the objectification of the unreflective pregnant transmen. Critics of displaying transbodies also bring out the issue of ableism and the concept of freakery wherein transbodies participate in an exhibition of human abnormality (Bogdan, 1996), appealing directly to “our most fundamental categories of self-definition and boundaries dividing self from otherness” (Grosz, 1996). While it can be argued that the transbodies are en-freakened and objectified due to their unorthodox corporealities, this work argues that the tendency of transpregnancy to be spectacularized as freakish is not merely a form of “othering” but rather an “affirmative freakery” (Fancy, 2018), that is, an affirmation of difference and freakiness outside of discourses of “non-normativity” and pathology (Fancy, 2018, p. 159). Note that the transpregnant body is different from bodies with inborn or congenital abnormality. Having an inborn body abnormality is seen with “authenticity” while having a trans-identity is rather “self-made”, choosing to forgo a normal status (Stulman-Dennett, 1997).

Moreover, to interpret the transpregnant selfies as further objectification is to assume pregnant transmen as passive narrators rather than active participants in the digital public sphere who are capable of reflection. These immediate reading of pregnant transmen selfies as a form of objectification, while has its own merits, nullify preceding practice of agency by pregnant transmen. These antecedent forms of agency have at least two levels. First, the transition towards manhood is a form of agency to defy the moralized and pathologized view against trans-identities. Second, being pregnant takes transmen identities to another level of agency by transgressing another set of expectations of manhood, allowing for a more complex understanding of trans-identities. Thus, visually displaying the transpregnant body, the products of transmen agency, cannot be interpreted as passivity because to do so is to ignore the antecedents from where this public display of their transpregnant bodies took off.

Beyond Recognition as Goal

Just because transmen pregnancies sidestep “othering”, does not mean that it is a form of gaining recognition either. These selfies are not new ways to defy the moralized and pathologized trans-identities. On the contrary, these selfies emphasize the similarities among uterus-owning bodies, thus transcending issues of recognition. The visual display of the transpregnant body focuses on how being pregnant is a shared experience by those who share similar biological prerequisite for human reproduction. Given that visibility does not necessarily equate to social power (Phelan, 1993), the selfies of pregnant transmen have more to do with transcending the natural-artificial dichotomy than with seeking recognition of the artificial transbody. The pregnant transmen’s presentation of their bodies is an example of how letting go of a “normal” status does not preclude them from utilizing their female organs, just like any other person with a womb. Whereas transmen’s visible physical transformation can seem excessive, shocking, and socially “out of place”, the ways, in which transpregnancy intersects with freakery occurs with an amount of security and not offered up to “the voyeuristic property of the non-disabled gaze” (Hevey, 1992, p. 72). This raises the question: what kind of connection does this practice forge to the moralizing and pathologizing tendencies of transpregnancy? There are at least three aspects of transpregnancy that do not signify any trans-identity-seeking recognition among the transmen selfies: 1) beyond trans-identity issue 2) beyond enhancement-related procedure and 3) beyond issues of victimhood.

First, just because transmen have public displays of transpregnancy does not mean that transpregnancy is only an issue of trans-identities. This practice extends to all uterus-owning bodies that do not satisfy bodily conventions such as, but by no means limited to, agender, bigender, demiboy/girl, genderfluid, genderfuck, genderqueer, and intergender. The language, under which transpregnancy thrives is the language of a maternal organism with terms such as “maternity”, “birth”, “offspring” among others, which are definitely not restricted to trans people. It is in this shared sense of reality with other womb owners that transpregnancy does not fall into simple trans-identity issues. Additionally, the accumulation of selfie uploads among pregnant transmen take place in the context of a relatively high level of advocates of “body-positive” online where the issue is about pregnancy shaming in general rather than gender politics. This highlights that as much as gender is politically-charged, transpregnancy is not exclusively grounded on gender struggles.

Second, while selfies cannot be completely isolated from aesthetic recognition, the transformation of the transpregnant body itself is not primarily about enhancement. Unlike documenting enhancement bodily transformations for trans people such as plastic surgery, moralizing and pathologizing norms do not have strong penetrative power over the photos of transpregnancy. As Kozinets et al., (2017) emphasize, selfies are more than mere narcissistic displays of the self, making it beyond moral and pathological discourses on trans-identity, which are

usually concerned with issues of authenticity. Since transmen are uterus-owners, there is little, if any, to moralize and pathologize about their transpregnancy selfies. And hence, there is nothing to gain recognition about. The selfies of pregnant transmen come with impulses to observe one's corporeal transformation beyond retaliation.

Finally, these selfies are rather displaying the similarities among bodies that share the same reproductive features than it is about highlighting the need to recognize diversity in gender and sexuality. By taking selfies, the transpregnant body expresses its connection to other bodies rather than presenting the struggles of an "interiorized" body (Bartky, 1990). While transpregnant selfies can be forms of advocacy and activism, these images do not come as suffering, pain or anything unpleasant. Rather, transpregnancy demonstrates that gender categorization does not justify disparate treatment among uterus-owning bodies. By presupposing a normative difference and not a hierarchy, transmen pregnancy exposes the political nature of that difference and counter its devaluation. Note that that some online interactions are potentially victimizing against pregnant transmen such as discriminating comments and trolls. However, these tendencies are much less about cis-pregnancy normativity than it is about the culture of feedback-giving and feedback-seeking on the online community (Leibold & Schwarz, 2015).

Suspending the Politics of Uterus-Owners

This work argues that, as an affirmative freakery, transmen pregnancy is rather a suspension of moralization and pathologization of transsexualism and transgenderism. It espouses a momentary dismissal of a gendered take of the body by serving as a reminder that pregnancy is not only women's concerns but a "uterus-owner's issue" (Stoffer, cited in Burkett, 2015). The pregnant transman's body, in its presumed state of a maternal organism, deviates in a way that the other transbodies cannot (i.e. transwomen, intersex), that is, it "arouses the contradictory responses of denial and recognition, disgust and empathy, exclusion and identification" (Shildrick, 2002, p. 17). Transmen pregnancy has the character of both disrupting the concept pregnancy-as-usual but at the same time demonstrates a very familiar experience of human reproduction that in itself "breaks with the conventions of desirability at any historical moment garners an unseemly attention for itself as the very product of its deviance" (Mitchell & Snyder, 2000). Compared to other trans people bodily alterations such as surgeries and hormone replacements, transpregnancy gains the most empathy because it as much as it can be strange, pregnancy is not treated as "simply exotic outliers to be sought for thrill, thrall, and titillation" (Fancy, 2018, p. 156).

Trans-identity bodily alterations may indeed justify normative gender performance by subscribing to some binary categories, but it does not mean that transbodies are always subject to this categorization. Whilst not without criticism and doubt about transmen's sense of agency, pregnant transmen's public images are neither subscription to cis-normativity nor what Foucault would call "voluntary

inservitude, of reflective indocility” (Foucault, 1996, p. 386). Rather, these images are representations of an active engagement of one’s transbody to an audience wherein the transpregnant body “not an object, but a full-fledged participant of the dialogue with the viewer. She is turned to us and looks active” (Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, 2001 cited in Orekh & Bogomiagkova, 2017). Hence, the transpregnant self-shooting reflects the experiences of transmen, which cannot be easily reduced to either “othering” or to gaining recognition, but which exceeds the possibilities of what are constituted as normative corporeality of pregnant bodies in contemporary societies.

Transmen’s conscious “self-made” freakery is coupled with the given knowledge that uterus-owners can be pregnant. Transmen pregnancy resists the constraining and contorting role that moralizing and pathologizing discourses on reproduction; and through selfies, it enforces upon bodies an agency through “renarrativization... and shifting to different narratives than ones of victimhood” (Fancy, 2018, p. 158). Through this “renarrativized” identities, transpregnant body defers the fetishized categorizations of corporealities, outside of morally and pathologically restricting reproductive embodiment and self-definition. The transpregnant body continues to interrupt the normative character of cis-pregnant bodies’ privileged status among the reproductive health discourses thereby the “process of exotification, channeled anxiety and projection are challenged” (Fancy, 2018, p. 159). Transpregnant selfies leaves away the binary opposition of bodies and images as subjects and objects “because the practice merges the subject and the object already on the material level” (Tiidenberg & Cruz, 2015). By taking selfies of their pregnant transbodies, the transmen self-shooters initiate a self-narration and affirmation of their transformation.

Further Issues on Reproductive Freedom(s)

Beyond the issues of the objectifying nature of moralization and pathologization, or the potentials of gaining empowerment via selfies, the entire activity of transpregnant self-shooting, posting and sharing might fall into the same trap that oppressed and marginalized the trans community. Transpregnant selfies may have suspended layers of dichotomous view on reproduction norms but it may also contain oppressive elements towards the other end of uterus-owners-the childfree by choice. If there is something to be vigilant of transpregnant selfies, it is its potential to place pronatalism on the pedestal and idealize pregnancy as a desirable end for all womb owners (e.g. #pregnancyforall campaign). Voluntary childlessness, or an active choice, commitment, and permanence regarding the decision not to parent (Houseknecht, 1987; Park, 2002), has been stigmatized by the same rhetoric of reproductive norms that marginalized the practice of transpregnancy. This takes the same normal vs abnormal argument whereby the decision to be childless is “deviant” or abnormal while choosing to be a parent is “normal” (Gillespie, 2000; Graham et al., 2013). Indeed, childfree individuals have been subjected into various constructions outside of the normal realm,

such as (1) deficient or meaningless people; (2) psychologically unstable; or (3) selfish individuals (Morison & Macleod, 2015). The moralizing and pathologizing tendencies towards voluntary childlessness take effect through applying the same normative expectation of parenthood to those who opt not to bear children (Moore, 2014). Moreover, not all trans people have the desire to experience transpregnancy. And if they expressed even a little hostility against transpregnancy, they will be labelled not only as against transpregnancy but against trans-identities themselves. It is in this sense of embracing the norm of pronatalism that the digital visibility of transpregnancy becomes rather oppressive of others. The real potential violence of the self-taken photo sharing online is that it can further displace some uterus-owners control over their own desires and bodies.

Fortunately, the same space of the digital media has become hospitable for uterus-owners, to construct their identities through childfree communities. These online communities have become a venue for disrupting the governing constructions of female identity, to which pregnancy is central (Shapiro, 2014). What this suggests then is the importance of vigilance in seeing how images in the online world create forcible framings of the trans-identity for self-presentation and idealization in an economy of attention and rating (i.e. “likes” and 5-stars). The selfie as a visual code shapes and reshapes our ideas of what is worth sharing, what is worth looking at, and what should garner our attention to notice and comment on. The selfies have created a particular grammar and, even more importantly, criteria of seeing. For the pregnant transmen, the most grandiose result of the selfie enterprise is to give them the sense that they can somehow hold and choose their own realities as a compendium of digital images.

Conclusion

Transpregnancy has the potential to provide a levelling discourse to neutralize worshipping the natural, as supported by technological innovations in the medical field, and the rising popularity of de-pathologization of disability. From an ideological standpoint, however, the selfies will continue to be scrutinized. When looking for signs of agency and emancipation, a selfie may not be the most useful kind of frame of references. However, with a focus upon the dynamic between the self-shooter and cultural context, and with an interest in how pregnant transmen establish trans-identity, the selfie's function takes on more complex dimensions, and the idea of valuing a typical selfie is more tenable. Rather than defining the pregnant transmen's selfies as just another trite expression, we might define the transpregnant selfie as a commonplace figurative expression that displays an immediate interaction of two polarized entities: (1) the unusual transbody, and (2) the ordinary discourse of the online culture. Such an interpretation does not applaud the selfies, but at the same time, it does not instantly assign limited expectations to the function of the selfie. The selfies from those who stand outside the sphere of society's definition of acceptable childbearers forged in the crucible of difference are reflective of the various ways the body could be different and the same, in various levels, all at once.

Giddens (1991) notes that individuals of modernity tend to be “self-reflexive” in resolving who they are and who they should be. This in turn makes the trans self to be “project” that individuals have to build thereby creating a biographical “narrative” that allows them to understand themselves, and hence sustain a coherent and consistent identity. The selfies add layers to this project by allowing the pregnant transmen to leave behind the moralized and pathologized take on trans-identities. The selfies prove to show that “bodies are involved more actively, more intimately, and more intricately in social processes than theory has usually allowed. Bodies participate in social action by delineating courses of social conduct – the body is a participant in generating social practice” Nagoshi (2010). Whilst images can reify gender biases through ways of participating in pregnancy, and therefore, help propagate unyielding limits placed on maternal and paternal roles, nevertheless, images, especially selfies also transcend normativity of the body. Finally, the selfies of transpregnant bodies also demonstrate that identity as constructed and changing rather than fixed (Giddens, 1991). Not all trans people may have strong political interest in the trans-identity struggle or not see gender as a political identity but what the selfies reflect is the “lived experience” of the trans body as it is constructed into the digital world.

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