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“Why can’t I take a full-shot of myself? Of course I can!” Studying selfies as socio-technological affective practices

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ABSTRACT

This article studies selfie-production as a socio-technological affective practice, bringing attention to a new and largely unstudied type of selfies, private selfies. Discussing an example of five Finnish women’s experiences with a body positive *#righttobeseen* campaign, the article argues for selfie scholarship to move beyond analyses of representation and image-sharing on social media platforms, if it is to understand selfies’ diverse role in selfie-takers’ lives. The article offers an analytical schema for studying selfies as socio-technological affective practices, combining the method of interview studies with affect theory and examination of selfies’ socio-technological underpinnings.

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Introduction

From mirror ***selfies* to groupies.¹ and from ***belfies*.² to *welfies*,³ there is no denying that selfies have become a staple of today’s social media landscape. Yet, from the perspective of social media analysis, the study of the selfie remains surprisingly orthodox, centering mainly on questions of visibility and the semiotic end-result of the practice. As social media scholars respond to accusations of the selfie as a symptom of the vanity of the 2010s, the focus of most studies remains on the empowering or disempowering elements of the selfie, read from the aesthetic surface of the image (see Theresa Senft 2015; Theresa Senft and Nancy Baym 2015). Yet, the selfie is not a mere image of a self positioned in front of the camera. It is also a practice (Edgar Gómez Cruz and Helen Thornham 2015; Mehita Iqani and Jonathan E. Schroeder 2016; Paul Frosh 2015) taken up in connection to cultural codes that are embedded in imaging technologies. In this article, I propose an alternative way of analyzing the selfie, exploring selfie-production as a socio-technological affective practice (on affective practice, see Margaret Wetherell 2014, 4, 9, 13–14, 23).

The article makes its argument through an example case of body positive selfies—a sub-category of selfies that aims to counter existing beauty ideals by making room for especially ***larger-than-normative*.⁴ bodies (see Alexandra Sastre 2014; Hayley Mowat, et al. 2018). While selfies have, in recent years, gained the interest of various feminist scholars working in the fields of media studies, gender studies, and sociology, the theories

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and methods used to understand selfies have been uniform, moving from representational analysis to discourse analysis on published selfies, and from Erving Goffman's theory of presentation of the self to Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity. In cases where research has focused on body positive selfies in specific, the emphasis has been on how the images challenge existing beauty norms and bring diversity to bodies visible in the media (e.g., Katrin Tiidenberg and Edgar Gómez Cruz 2015; Sastre 2014). While the field of fat studies is paying increasing attention to the ways that body size intersects with other differences (see e.g., Catherine Connell 2013; Cat Pausé 2014), the connections of size to race in particular need further exploring (see Apryl A. Williams 2017).

In this article, I define selfie-production as a practice not necessarily leading to the publication of images. As such, the article calls attention to a significantly less studied type of selfies: private selfies which one takes mainly for oneself (for exceptions, see Kath Albury 2015; Katie Warfield 2017; see also Jill Walker Rettberg 2014, 33–34). With an exploration of five white Finnish women's experiences of body positive selfie-production, the article argues for the value of looking at the whole production-process of selfies, and points towards the complex ways in which audiences and media users engage with cultural products (cf. Jackie Stacey 1994; Janice Radway 1984). Focusing on the interviewees' subjective experiences of the selfie phenomenon, the article shows what can be accomplished by analyzing selfie-production and selfies as socio-technological affective practices.

The material consists of in-depth interviews that have been conducted in connection to a Finnish body positive campaign called #righttobeseen (in Finnish #lupanäkyä) in 2017. This non-profit campaign organized by YLE, the Finnish public service broadcasting company, and taking place mainly on Jenny and the Fat Myth Busters peer support group on Facebook (in Finnish Jenny ja läskimyytinmurtajat), encouraged Finns to let their larger-than-normative bodies to be seen in public. While according to the campaign announcement (#Righttobeseen Facebook Event 2017), making oneself seen could mean anything from wearing a bright shade of lipstick to work to voicing one's opinion in a group discussion, the campaign became most associated with body positive selfies. Of the five interviewees, three had taken and shared their own #righttobeseen selfies. The other two had not taken #righttobeseen images but had followed the campaign as members of Jenny and the Fat Myth Busters. Interestingly, two interviewees' #righttobeseen pictures were taken by their partners. Both still described their images as selfies, since they were the ones setting the picture-productions in motion and pulling the strings throughout the photo-shoots.

Based on the interviewees' understandings, the article discusses the selfie as any photograph—published or private—that the photographed subject has been in charge of producing. While this definition differs from some technological understandings of the genre (e.g., Jerry Saltz 2014), it reflects body positive selfie-takers' needs and aims for image-production. Since taking full-shots is difficult with the phone's front-camera or through a mirror, two of the interviewed selfie-takers asked someone else to click the camera button. The article, therefore, points towards the limitations, as well as the potential, of front-camera and mirror selfie-taking.

From the analysis of the selfie as an image ...

In analyzing the selfie as a practice, I join scholars like Cruz and Thornham (2015), and Frosh (2015) who have previously suggested that the selfie should be understood as

a practice or as a gesture involving mediation. They ascribe the sociability and normativity of the selfie to the whole process of picture-production rather than to a single image shared on a social media platform. While selfie-takers often describe images, such as body positive selfies, in empowering terms, and while this could easily be interpreted as proof of the selfie as an intentional self-representation, the argument can also be read “with/in a wider discourse of new media and consumerism where individuality, intentionality and rational causality are default modes of expression” (Cruz and Thornham 2015, 7). Continuing this train of thought, analyzing the selfie as a practice involves understanding it as deeply intertwined with social understandings and digital customs but also with affects. Emphasizing the affective side of selfie-production allows for zooming in on the ambiguity of experiencing one’s body through the practice.

In general discussion, selfies continue to be seen in relation to vanity, mental health problems, or accidents caused by careless photographers. This negative rhetoric has been picked up by feminist media studies scholars (see Anne Burns 2015; Kate Miltner and Nancy Baym 2015) who have argued that since it is young people and young women, in particular, that are imagined to be in danger because of the new technology, the situation now resembles a moral panic. Many have aimed at redeeming the genre by discussing its empowering potential and by arguing that selfies bring visibility to bodies that have previously been ignored in culture (e.g., Katrin Tiidenberg 2018; Mowat et al. 2018). On the other hand, some feminist scholars remain critical of selfies’ potential to bring about bodily liberation and point to their connection to neoliberal and capitalist ideologies. Sastre (2014) argues that while body positive self-representations strive for visual performances that facilitate emancipation, they seem to ultimately reflect narratives of conformity and regulation. Body positive self-representations fulfil a contradictory function for the marginalized subject. Although the need for emancipatory self-images is the highest for the most marginalized subjects, such as racialized fat women or trans-people (see Samantha Kwan 2010), the risks for taking and sharing such images and facing shaming are also greater. Yet, the majority of body positive websites and other spaces focus on self-representations by white women and expect other subjects’ ideas of their bodies to confirm to the standards of white cis-genderness (Williams 2017).

While published selfies on body positive websites and on other platforms offer influential framings of what body positivity can be imagined to consist of, they represent only one aspect of how digital photographs are used and how they work. As I will go on to show, staging, shooting, and choosing of images, sometimes with publishing in mind, sometimes not, offers sensuous information of the body that can affect the way that it is experienced as a whole.

... Towards the analysis of the selfie as a socio-technological affective practice

Affect, a bodily potential or a modification in its capacity to act (Benedictus de Spinoza 2009, 151), has during the last decade or so become an important concept to analyze social media. Scholars have utilized the concept in the study of online networking and civic engagement (Zizi Papacharissi 2014; Carrie Rentschler 2017), investigated how the architecture of social media and information technology allows for affects to cluster and intensify (Jodi Dean 2015; Susanna Paasonen 2011), as well as analyzed the affective

qualities of human–machine interaction (Jussi Parikka 2015; Lisa Blackman 2012). In selfie research, theories of performativity remain dominant, yet several scholars (e.g., Katie Warfield 2018; Mette Sandbye 2018) have, in the last few years, turned to affect to explain the social functions of the genre. In what follows, I will show how affect theory can be helpful for understanding the selfie as a live practice. I claim that studying selfie-production as a socio-technological affective practice allows for moving past the binary rhetoric of empowerment/disempowerment that continues to characterize much of discussion on the genre.

In analyzing selfie-production as a way of experiencing one's body (cf. Rebecca Coleman 2013a, Rebecca Coleman 2013b), I utilize the concepts of "affective re-training" and "affective practice" coined by social psychologist Margaret Wetherell (2014, 4, 9, 12–14, 23). With affective practice Wetherell refers to the spontaneous dimensions of reacting and relating to things but also to questions about becoming trained and potentially re-trained in "affective patterns". These patterns relate to the culturally managed and specific, expected routes that corporeal and emotional reactions and expressions of feeling are supposed to follow. Affective practices are ways in which we enact, perform and "feel" feelings repeatedly, either following culturally acceptable affective patterns or diverging from them, but always in relation to them. While affective practices become easily routinized, it is possible to decompose them and replace them with other affective routes (Wetherell 2014, 4). This so-called affective re-training is, however, the harder to do the more people are involved in the practice, or the more intense the affects are.

Since in Western societies, bodily fat and fitness are continuously treated as something dangerous, shameful, and disgusting (e.g., Katariina Kyrölä 2010; Kathleen LeBesco 2004; Hannele Harjunen 2009), fat shaming or the deprecation of one's own or others' norm-exceeding bodies can be understood as a widely shared affective practice. The practice has socio-technological connections and consequences: my interviewees state that because of their larger-than-normative bodies, taking and appearing in pictures often feels stressful and they sometimes evade picturing-practices altogether. However, in today's visual and digital culture, picture evasion is socially limiting. This is where #right-tobeseen campaign comes in. The campaign and body positive selfie-production stand as attempts of affective re-training or changing one's affective relation to one's body and to appearing in photographs. It looks for new kinds of knowledges of and with one's body (cf. Coleman 2013a, 2013b). Posing for the camera, looking at the body from different angles, and moving it in interaction with the screen work as cognitive and corporeal techniques. The body is involved with selfie-production not only as an object to be photographed but also as an actor creating the image with its movement (Coleman 2013b, 11). The body quite concretely becomes sensed as a living body that is continuously being re-shaped by its doings (see Sara Ahmed 2006, 130).

The experiences of my interviewees imply to contradictions and ambivalence in the selfie practice by refusing any simplistic readings of positivity or negativity. Focusing on body positive selfie-production as a socio-technological affective practice allows for analyzing this ambiguity. Fat shaming as an affective practice is highly social, built on culturally and socially shared beliefs of fatness (cf. Elsbeth Probyn 2005, 2–4). Sociability makes fat shaming a lasting practice and creates obstacles for affective re-training. While body positive selfie-production offers tools for re-imagining and discerning internalized

fat shaming, the orientations of one's surroundings may push against dismantling (see Ahmed 2006, 129; Kyrölä 2010, 6–8). This becomes apparent when looking at the subjective experiences of my interviewees.

Case #righttobeseen

#Righttobeseen is a sub-campaign of a larger Finnish body positive campaign called Scale Rebellion (in Finnish Vaakakapina) that spread throughout the year of 2017 on Yle's media outlets. The aim of Scale Rebellion was to start "Finland's biggest rebellion of weight control and body positivity" by urging people to desert quick diets and focus on slow lifestyle changes instead (Scale Rebellion website, Yle 2017). Besides public announcements, blogs, and information packages, the Rebellion had its own closed, yet extremely popular, Facebook peer support group,⁵ Jenny and the Fat Myth Busters.⁶ In the group, Finns discussed the meanings of body positivity, shared personal anguish over unpleasant encounters with fat phobic people, and shared selfies or other images of their larger-than-normative bodies.

In spring 2017, Jenny and The Fat Myth Busters became downright busy with selfies, when the campaign's figurehead, journalist and media personality Jenny Lehtinen declared that the 23rd of May would be a national #righttobeseen day. She encouraged everyone to break visibility boundaries on that day—no matter what these may be for each individually.⁷ Many Fat Myth Busters took up the challenge and posted the results in the form of a selfie on the group wall. Selfies were posted also on Instagram, on Fat Myth Busters' personal Facebook walls, and updated as profile pictures on other platforms often, but not always, accompanied with the hashtag #righttobeseen. The pictures varied from sexy selfies to gym selfies, and to fitting room selfies of trying on something that one is not accustomed to wearing. #Righttobeseen reached a significant popularity. Based on an API search done in the beginning of April 2020, #righttobeseen has been used on public Instagram accounts alone 1, 794 times.

I became aware of #righttobeseen in late May 2017 as an average but not a very active member of Jenny and the Fat Myth Busters. #Righttobeseen images started regularly appearing on my Facebook feed. More than the pictures themselves, the stories behind them caught my interest. To get to the "behind-the-scenes" accounts, I contacted the administrator of the group asking if I could post a research request on the group wall. They granted me permission, so I wrote a post welcoming all interested members of the group to write to me an email answering the following questions: "What does #righttobeseen mean to you? How about your own #righttobeseen selfie? Tell me about the picture-taking process." I added that also people who had not taken and shared their own #righttobeseen selfie could write to me if they were interested in discussing the campaign in general. Five people sent me a short text where they answered my questions. They further agreed to meet me face-to-face for in-depth interviews. All five were white cis-women, ages ranging from 25 to 57. I refer to each interviewee with a pseudonym but mention their ages as well, as these can be considered relevant in the interviewees' relation to selfie technology. Of the five interviewees, Krista (25 years), Jutta (36 years), and Maarit (40 years) had taken and shared their own #righttobeseen picture in the Jenny and the Fat Myth Busters Facebook group. Petra (27 years) and Onerva (57 years) had not done so but had followed the campaign at Jenny and the Fat Myth Busters, and were interested enough in it to want to discuss it with me.

Interviews with the five women (210 minutes of taped material altogether) that were conducted separately in March 2018 make up the primary material for this article. I am also including the messages that the interviewees sent to me in late 2017 as a reply to my Facebook post, plus our exchange after the face-to-face meetings where I aimed to clarify some remaining questions. Perhaps the most important of these was, how the interviewees themselves experience their distance from or proximity to cultural size norms. While the definition of fatness differs from context to context, I understand personal experience to be that which marks fatness for a subject (see Charlotte Cooper 2016, 1; Hannele Harjunen 2007, 205–206). When I asked my interviewees which words they prefer to use to describe their bodies, all five said that they do not like to refer to themselves as fat since they associate the word with bullying. All still considered themselves larger than what is the norm in Finnish and Western cultures. To respect my interviewees' self-definition, I use the term "larger-than-normative" throughout the article. While the number of interviewees is small and does not allow for generalizations, it does offer accounts of selfie-practices and experiences that are largely invisible in public discussions on self-imaging. The number of interviews enables zooming in on each interviewee's account in such detail that would be impossible to achieve with a bigger number of participants.

As the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity does not demand an IRB approval, or an ethical review statement for a human sciences interview study where the research participants are above 15 years old and where the content of the interview is not considered harmful for the participants (TENK website 2019), an ethical committee was not contacted for conducting this research. However, I have undertaken many measures to ensure the ethicality of the research. These include using pseudonyms, leaving out all information that could lead to the participants' possible identification, keeping the interviewees updated on the progress of the research, and letting them know that they have the right to opt out from the research at any point if they wish to. Prior to the interviews, I explained that the purpose of the interviews was to produce information on how taking body positive selfies was experienced and felt by selfie-takers themselves. I added that the material would be used to write a journal article which would, in time, be included in my Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation in Media Studies, a larger project analyzing affects and four separate cases of body positivity in the Finnish media. I further paid attention to describing my own relation to the study for the interviewees. Although my own current body is usually understood as "average-sized", my childhood and teenage years were characterized by having a larger-than-normative body. This has made me know fat shaming on an intimate level, although I am no longer objected to. To account for a more equal encounter with the interviewees, I decided to share this information with them.

While my interviewees represent varying ages, I am aware that many other differences remain hidden in the material based on the interviewees' socio-cultural positions and my own. For example, my whiteness may have contributed to non-white Fat Myth Busters not replying to my post or feeling like the post was not addressed to them (cf. Williams 2017; Richard Dyer 1997, 2–3). In leaving the request open for anyone in the group to answer, I was hoping to spark the interest of people of multiple positions and backgrounds. While the tactic seems to have worked in terms of the participants' age, it fell unfortunately short with regards to other differences. Had I asked the respondents to comment on how

they thought their racialized position affected their selfie-taking experience, for example, the material might look different.

In saving the interviews, I used an audio recorder. I transcribed the recordings, and went through the transcripts several times. During the first two rounds, I paid specific attention to how the interviewees describe their motivations for taking/not taking part in #righttobeseen selfie-production, and how they discuss the affectivity of the practice of taking selfies. By round three, I became aware that the interviewees' accounts often revolve around questions of shaming and shame. Therefore, the last few rounds were spent in focusing on how the interviewees reproduce or question notions of shame as a defining experience of having a larger-than-normative body. I will start the analysis part of this article by interpreting selfie-production practices with/against the concept of visibility. I will then go on to discuss body positive selfie-production as corporeal movement and affective motion.

Making oneself seen through private selfies

In the interviews, the participants often discussed selfie-production as a way of questioning gendered body norms and a way of feeling liberated in and about one's body. Also, in the framework of neoliberalism, visibility is largely understood as synonymous with empowerment. While earlier feminist framings of visibility treated it as a viable route to structural liberation through its ability to make marginal voices heard, in neoliberalism, being seen is an end in itself (Sarah Banet-Weiser 2018; Angela McRobbie 2008). Several social media scholars (e.g., Alice E. Marwick 2013, 13; Iqani and Jonathan 2016) argue that social media technologies heighten subjects' need for visibility even further. They allow for and guide towards visual representations of the self, thus making a large number of bodies an object of regulation. As #righttobeseen campaign suggests strategies to make oneself seen in public, it can be criticized for following neoliberal logics (cf. Samantha Murray 2008, 87; Sastre 2014; Rosalind Gill and Ana Sofia Elias 2014). Based on the campaign announcement, body positivity is ultimately the larger-than-normative subject's own responsibility. In taking and sharing selfies, the subject has the right, but perhaps also the responsibility, to become visible and feel empowered.

Selfie-production is not only about a particular kind of body becoming represented in the media, however. In this section of the article, I offer an alternative reading of visibility by accentuating the experienced meaning of image-production for the pictured self. Besides allowing for media-visibility, image-practices, such as selfies, also make material bodies sense themselves and become aware of themselves in new ways (see Kath Woodward 2015, 40–57; Coleman 2013a).

As in today's visual and digital landscapes, photographs and photographing situations have concrete social functions, the absence of selfies and other self-images is also noteworthy. In its most extreme, not having pictures of oneself can be read as a sign of non-existence, misrecognition, and confusion about belonging to a group. (Woodward 2015, 99–103). All of my interviewees say that they, at least sometimes, avoid appearing in photographs. Maarit (40 years) says that her #righttobeseen selfie was her first full-shot in a decade: "Even at family gatherings I have stayed away from the camera. No such pictures [full-shots] of me simply exist." The youngest interviewees, Krista (25 years) and Petra (27 years), explain that when in front of a camera, they often try to hide particular

parts of their body. In her #righttobeseen picture, Krista wanted to show her, up-until-then, unphotographed belly area. Petra, on the other hand, says that had she taken a #righttobeseen selfie, it would probably have been an unretouched one as she almost always uses an app to make her skin look flawless in pictures. Neither Krista nor Petra are unfamiliar with producing selfies. They say that they take them whenever they feel that they look particularly nice, although they only occasionally share them on social media.

#Righttobeseen is based on the idea that larger-than-normative subjects avoid visibility because they have internalized strict societal bodily ideals and are therefore ashamed of their bodies. Sociological study suggests that larger-than-normative people commonly feel unease at public places, where there is a higher chance of their bodies becoming a center of attention (Jeannine Gailey 2014; see also Hannele Harjunen 2016, Hannele Harjunen 2019; Kwan 2010). This may lead to actions, such as not appearing in photographs (see also Silvan Tomkins 2008, 351). Yet, avoidance does not necessarily signal a feeling of shame. As affect scholar Tomkins (2008, 361–362) suggests, acts of shaming can result in counter-contempt, making the shamed one turn against their shamer. While in the case of shame, the shamed one wants to be accepted by their shamer, in the case of counter-contempt, the shamer's acceptance is of no value.

Two of my interviewees, Petra (27 years) and Onerva (57 years), did not take part in #righttobeseen selfie production. The way they describe this decision is interesting, when the absence of action is seen as important as the action itself. Both understand the #righttobeseen campaign's meaning to lie mainly in the sharing of pictures, not necessarily in taking them. Petra says that while she highly appreciates the campaign, she did not want to share her own image, because sharing a lot of selfies and "making a fuss of herself" is simply not what she likes to do. She mainly uses social media, such as YouTube or Facebook, for sharing videos or for having conversations. While she does take selfies, she prefers not to share them. Onerva, on the other hand, is more critical of the #righttobeseen campaign and selfie culture at large:

Overall, it's quite difficult for me to understand, and I don't know if it's because of my age or something else, but anyway, it's difficult to understand why there is such a need to be visible all the time. I mean in public. [...] How could sharing a particular kind of picture on social media, and getting likes for it, make one more body positive? (Onerva)

While Onerva is saddened by the fact that aging women are so invisible in the society, she does not see image-sharing as a functional method for changing this. She has tried taking selfies a few times but feels that she is not good at taking them, and says that she does not see the need to practice either. Mainly her social media use consists of keeping in touch with friends and relatives on Facebook, and networking on LinkedIn. Thus, her decision not to produce a #righttobeseen image is in line with her usual social media practices and understandings.

The moving selfie body

Since in selfie-production, the moving body interacts with the screen to produce a series of images, selfie-taking shares significant similarities with the use of other interactive screens and mirrors (see Warfield 2017). In her study on interactive mirrors, Rebecca Coleman (2013a, 47–71, 2013b, 11–15) claims that interactive mirrors bring focus on the

screen as well as on the body. Rather than the screen dissolving into the background, and attention being fixed on the image of the body, the virtual screen accentuates the engagement and interaction of the body with the screen. Coleman builds her argument on interactive mirrors at high-end stores, like the Prada store in Manhattan. Although selfie screens differ from fitting room mirrors in their smaller size and greater availability, they too intensify the experience of seeing one's reflection. "Through the interactive screen, the image is done with, the body is doing with the image" (Coleman 2013b, 13).

Looking at one's moving image on a virtual screen differs from the experience of seeing printed or published images of oneself. While photographs as objects are frozen, and allow their viewers to scrutinize the body in detail (see Kyrölä 2010, 6), the moving reflection of the body on the virtual screen gives an idea of an animated and lively body. In the case of a larger-than-normative subject, the intimate following of the body on the screen can pose a welcome challenge to pre-existing understandings of it (e.g., Adwoa A. Afful and Rose Ricciardelli 2015; Lauren Gurrieri and Helene Cherrier 2013). Instead of seeing only one version of the body in a photograph, the selfie-taker follows the formation of the image, and repositions their body to see it in different angles. When the practice is repeated again and again, it can start functioning like affective re-training. As Maarit (40 years) states: "Only now, and with selfies, the more people talk about them, the more I come across them, I have learnt to see good things in my pictures as well." Taking a selfie combines seeing and doing. The moving body creates an image on the screen, and the photographer registers the movement both directly in their body and by looking at the screen (cf. Mika Elo 2012).

The sense of being with one's body is particularly intense, when the photographer and the photographed are the same person. However, taking a picture with a front-camera or through the mirror allows for only a limited range of poses. While front-camera selfies often focus on the face, body positive pictures aim to catch the entire larger-than-normative body on camera (e.g., Afful et al. 2015; Gurrieri et al. 2013). In order to get polished full-shots, two of my interviewees, Krista (25 years) and Jutta (36 years) asked their partners to take the picture. However, the presence of another person in the image production situation has implications. Although the pictured subject may still be in control of setting things in motion and of keeping it going, such as in the case of Krista and Jutta, they are not able to observe their moving body on screen while taking the image. At the same time, the sociality of the situation heightens the need to explain one's motives for selfie production instead of simply "feeling it" (cf. Kaisu Hynnä and Kyrölä Katariina 2019). Krista, whose #righttobeseen picture was taken by her boyfriend on her 25th birthday, describes her experience during and after the photo-shoot in the following way:

There was this joy about the fact that I had saved this milestone of an age but also joy about doing something beyond exciting. And possibly also this satisfaction that someone [Krista's partner] was weirded out by the fact that I wanted a full-shot of myself. Like: "What is this thing here now?" But like: "You have no idea!" Or in a way like: "Why can't I take a full-shot of myself? Of course I can!" (Krista)

Movement and agency are thematically inscribed to many #righttobeseen selfies. According to my interviewees, the core idea of the pictures is to show a larger-than-

normative body as a capable doer. While Maarit's (40 years) after-gym selfie is taken through the mirror of a women's locker room, Jutta's (36 years) selfie positions her on top of a hill after a long upward hike:

I climbed on top of it, I guess it was the Ruka hill that I climbed on top of. And I was about to give up many times during the climb. Or actually, I had given myself the permission to give up. Like, if I can't do it, it's ok. But as I reached the top, and I was all sweaty and panting, and didn't really feel that fresh. But anyway I had this feeling of being a winner. So I thought that this group [Jenny and the Fat Myth Busters] was the place where I'd like to share this feeling. (Jutta)

Many #righttobeseen pictures aim at capturing the capable and agential larger-than-normative body on camera. Krista, Jutta, and Maarit all say that they took dozens of selfies during their #righttobeseen selfie session, instead of just the one that was shared on social media. Krista and Jutta further explain that they made the conscious decision of not deleting the series from their devices. They explain that the series as a whole, rather than just one image, constitutes a meaningful memory of the moment when it was taken (cf. Rettberg 2014). While a single shot may not be able to incorporate movement as such, looking at selfies as a serial reveals their potential of conveying motion.

Affective re-training and its challenges

The previous part of the article focused on the concrete movement of the body in front of the virtual screen. As movement is also at the heart of affect theories (e.g., Gilles Deleuze 1998, 125; Brian Massumi 2002), this part will zoom in on the less tactile affective movement of the body when taking selfies. For Spinoza (2009, 151), affect is movement, as it is a "modification of the body, whereby the active power of the said body is increased or diminished, aided or constrained". For Wetherell (2014, 12), movement resides in the constant affective flow of the body. Although affects sometimes come to the front and sometimes decrease to the background, their flow never ceases. Affects are involved in all selfie-taking situations, no matter how emotional or neutral they may appear, and whether they strive to bring about certain affects or not (see also Senft and Nancy 2015, 1589).

Movement is further incorporated into affective re-training (Wetherell 2014, 9, 14) that seeks to change the usual route of affects as they appear in socio-emotional practices. Since fat shaming is fabricated into cultural and social meaning-making processes (e.g., Gailey 2014; Murray 2008), there is particular stiffness to it. While body positive selfie-production may produce pleasurable feelings of one's body, experiences of fat shaming, during or after picture production, may push the body back to old affective patterns. Simultaneously, a fear of shaming can affect the subject's experience of picture-taking. Jutta (40 years) describes her #righttobeseen selfie-taking situation in the following way:

[The #righttobeseen selfie] was taken in such a moment where I had just gotten into the habit of going to the gym, and it was fun and felt good and ... In that moment, I wanted to take the picture. But now that I think about it, I wonder why I had to stop taking pictures as soon as someone else walked into the room. I mean, what was that about? Like it's totally normal at gyms. People take selfies. But like in my case it was especially embarrassing. (Jutta)

Jutta's experience, that could be characterized with the words hesitant and ambivalent, can be understood through her unfamiliarity with appearing in full-shots, the semi-publicness of the picture-taking environment, and the tenacity of fat shaming. The fact that the location for picture-taking was a gym is noteworthy here. Sociological studies (Kwan 2010; Hannele Harjunen 2019) have found that larger-than-normative people often experience fat shaming at gyms and other places of exercise. While they may be expected to inhabit gyms for the purpose of losing weight, they are not allowed to use the environment for other purposes, such as taking selfies (cf. Ahmed 2017, 214).

The tenacity of shaming is implicated also in the way that it seems to come into focus in situations where there is no outside threat of shaming. Jutta talks about her recent experience of taking selfies at home. Since she was soon to have bariatric surgery, she wanted to take pictures to remember her body the way it was then, before surgery:

Last week I took a whole bunch of selfies, both through the mirror and with the front-camera. Kind of these pictures where I could see all the difficult and disturbing and horrible parts of my body. The parts that I hate right now. And I was wondering whether in about two years' time the day would come when I could actually publish these pictures somewhere. But right now, just one week after taking the pictures, looking at them makes me feel quite depressed. And I don't mean because of the fat. I'm talking about my facial expression and how it is so ... [Jutta stops talking.] (Jutta 40 years)

While body positive selfies are often described as vehicles of empowerment and self-love, they sometimes end up alienating the larger-than-normative subject from their body and its affective experiences, as Jutta's example suggests. Alienation is arguably the likelier the wider the subject's distance to the norm is (see Ahmed 2014, 10–12). However, similar to other body positive campaigns (cf. e.g., Josée Johnston and Judith Taylor 2008; Sastre 2014), #righttobeseen does not acknowledge that its participants are, despite shared experiences of being larger-than-normative, differently positioned when it comes to the likelihood of facing fat shaming. Further, they are not guided to ponder their size's connection to other social or identity categories.

As a result, size's interplay with other differences easily go unnoticed for participants that have not personally experienced it. For example, whereas other interviewees describe #righttobeseen as a campaign whose participants represent differing ages, occupations, and backgrounds, Onerva (57 years) aptly questions its sole focus on body size. She suggests that age should be considered a factor for #righttobeseen:

In a way then, from my perspective at least, one has to ask whether the young and the beautiful are the only ones with the right to be seen? Or made-up and accessorized people? (Onerva)

Also other less often articulated social factors undoubtedly had an impact on the experiences of #righttobeseen selfie-production, and selfie-production in general. The significant whiteness of Jenny and the Fat Myth Busters has most likely affected how racialized people relate to the campaign. Race is not mentioned as a factor in #righttobeseen experiences, yet it is relevant and functioning like an absent-present discourse (cf. Dyer 1997, 2–3). The invitation to be seen, especially in the context of Finland where whiteness is hugely hegemonic, wards off differences other than body size, and simultaneously pushes non-white bodies out as potential partakers. Whereas white Fat Myth Busters may largely forget their racial privilege in #righttobeseen, non-white members are constantly

reminded that, even in the framework of a body positive campaign and group, their body is non-confirmative (see Kwan 2010).

Conclusion

In this article, I have suggested studying selfies as socio-technological affective practices. I have argued that scholars need to account for the production of selfies, both private and published, if we are to understand how selfies function in the everyday lives of digital media users. By analyzing some possible ways of producing selfies in a body positive selfie campaign, I have offered a concrete example on how focusing on selfie-production and its affectivity can enrich selfie studies.

My analysis has come in three strands: selfies as a method for changing one's own visual image of oneself, selfies as corporeal movement, and selfies as affective movement. Each strand comes with its own specific claim to move selfie studies forward. As a part of the first analytical strand, I have suggested a move from the analysis of representational visibility into an analysis of the meanings of visibility for the pictured self (cf. Woodward 2015, 99–103). Most scholars focusing on body positive selfies tend to look at selfies through the concepts of visibility and invisibility. They argue that selfies can bring visibility to bodies that have previously been ignored in the media. While I find this viewpoint important, I have suggested that selfies' meaning cannot be emptied into what they show to others. Instead, and especially in the case of private selfies, it is important to look at how and what selfies mean to the pictured self. In digital landscapes, the absence of self-images can signal isolation, mis-recognition, and confusion about belonging to social groups just as much as empowerment, visibility or belonging.

In the second strand, I have suggested analyzing selfies as corporeal movement, which means paying attention to the ways that selfies come about as a result of bodily motion, and as co-operation of movement and sight (cf. Coleman 2013a, 2013b). Selfies in general and body positive selfies in particular are tools for knowledge production of and with one's body. When selfies are looked at as movement, the analysis of separate, published selfies becomes less important. Instead, the analysis of selfie production and selfies as serials, with their potential of encompassing movement and agency, highlights their meaning as processes and affective practices, rather than just representations.

Although selfie serials that show the larger-than-normative body as a capable doer understandably matter for their producers, selfies or selfie production does not neatly fall into the binary categories of empowering or disempowering. This brings me to the third analytical strand, selfies as affective movement. When selfies are analyzed in this way, attention shifts from image-objects to the affective practices (see Wetherell 2014) and experiences involved with image-production. While some of my interviewees found #righttobeseen's selfie-format largely inviting, the oldest interviewee (Onerva, 57 years) described the format as un-approachable, incredible, and accessible only for the young. Analyzing selfies as affective movement makes clear the "less-obvious" affective qualities of their production. Attention shifts to questions, such as, what is left out from the pictures, or who cannot or does not want to take part in this image-production.

Notes

1. Group selfies.
2. Selfies featuring one's buttocks.
3. Workout selfies.
4. I use the term larger-than-normative to refer to bodies that are understood to be larger than what is the social norm in Western societies. While in fat studies and fat activism (see e.g., Cooper 2016, 1) *fat* is often used in the same way, my interviewees mainly refuse the term because of its pejorative connotations.
5. Since August 12 2018, under the name Body Myth Busters (in Finnish Kehomyytinmurtaajat).
6. On November 9th, 2017, the day that I started acquiring interviewees from the group, it had 32 868 individual members.
7. Although #righttobeseen was initially meant to be tied to a specific day, the hashtag is sometimes still used.

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Data availability statement

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