One digital representation that has become popular in our new age of social media and
digital technology is the selfie. A selfie is a digital image, one takes of oneself with a smart
phone camera. This cultural icon became so popular that in 2013 the word selfie, after appearing
so often in the electronic and print media, was chosen as the Oxford English Dictionary’s “Word
of the Year.” Your general portrait selfie is an overall accepted form of a valid media image
today, but there is one type of selfie coined the “Bathroom Selfie” that has become socially
controversial. “It is largely a teenage and celebrity social phenomena, because both categories of
people are intensely focused on how they are perceived by others” (Peyser). I chose to analyze
this Bathroom Selfie Phenomenon that research says 54% of young girls have participated in. I
question why this form of visual imagery is popular with teens, and why it is so frequently used
on social media sites like Instagram and common dating apps. What does the bathroom selfie say
about our culture? What does it mean?

Critical visual methodology in Communication Studies is central to the cultural social life
in today’s contemporary society. “Primarily, culture is concerned with production and exchange
of meaning, ‘the giving and taking of meaning between members of a society or group…Thus
culture depends on its participants interpreting meaningfully what is around them” (Rose, 2 Hall,
1997). This critical analysis, by carefully observing the digital image’s main character, who is
also the photographer, usually a young teenager female sparsely dressed, posed in a somewhat
sexually revealing position in a private bathroom setting, confronts how the bathroom selfie’s
visual characteristics contribute to the social conditions and cultural effects of the bathroom
selfie in today’s postmodern Western Society.
I personally became interested in the sexism connotations of the Bathroom selfie when I realized on my Instagram Newsfeed, I was constantly seeing bathroom selfies of girls pop up after receiving likes by my male friends on Instagram. It wasn’t by far the first time I had seen this display. As early as Fifth grade the middle school neighborhood girl from California sent out bathroom selfies across the internet to all the boys on the block causing a neighborhood uproar. On the soccer fields I listened to girl after girl talk about sending sexualized selfies. Peer pressure and popularity, revolved around this sexism art that had gone viral. I chose to be a silent observer and stay back in the shadows as not to get caught up in the new normality that had begun to create a new culture. I have a lot of questions about the bathroom selfies and I will discuss my findings in my research paper.

This project will contribute to an ongoing conversation and debate on complicated issues surrounding the cultural effects of posting bathroom selfies online across various social media sites. The conversation will be framed around feminism theory, using the theories of objectification, consumerism, psychoanalysis, as well as, patriarchy and male gender equality, to reveal both sides of the issue. Since teenage girls are the largest group to share their selfies, the effects of the bathroom selfie on their complex psychological ties and sexuality connections to the selfie will be questioned and addressed. Age and responsibility to our youth will be challenged by other scholars. By comparing scholarly papers with the totally different points of view of modernist feminism(2nd wave feminism ), who believe that our society is sliding back into a male dominated patriarchal society where the gender inequity if on the rise again, to the liberal views of the postfeminism women who believes feminists have accomplished their goals and now have complete equality with men so young girls should have the right to show nudity and express their identity as a sign of empowerment, shows there is not just one answer to the
question of bathroom selfies. There are strong arguments for and against the bathroom selfie. I will also be looking at arguments that are pro sexualized bathroom selfies. I will look at how the double standard for young women is like a double-sided sword, offering independence and power to their female gender, but presenting a risk to their identity and self-respect, thus making us wonder if there is a need for education, and should selfies be approached with responsibility.

The main objective of young women in making selfies is empowerment and self-esteem. The bathroom selfie is a more controversial topic because the bathroom selfie deals with sexism and the way our culture responds to the selfie. 90% of the teenagers that participate in posting risky bathroom selfies are girls.

I will look at the young girl’s purpose in the production of the bathroom selfie and how it is twofold. Another debated problem seen with the selfie between the two feminists’ groups is gaining conformation from likes. Postfeminist women see nothing wrong with the self-absorbed, self-centered mannerisms of this young generation, but the 2\textsuperscript{nd} wave modernist feminist sees a caustic narcissistic forming personality disorders. The viewer is the one who sends the “likes.” He is the one empowered, polls taken have shown that there are more likes from men on sexualized bathroom selfies than women likes. Modern feminists’ “argue that rather than conferring power, selfies transfer control to viewers because in the end they are the ones who decide:” This challenges Post-feminists’ “core beliefs (Murphy). Although the male observer is not the one with the camera, his online presence is commanding explicit sexual images of her body. Post-feminists say that the camera gives the producer of the selfie the power to create an image of her true self. She is the one who is snapping the selfie. From “their earliest childhoods on, women are taught to constantly survey themselves so that they appear how others want them to appear” (Maddox). The “male gaze” is in full force.
Some of the questions that have emerged through my research are:

1) Is posting selfies an empowering and uplifting activity, or does it reinforce the notion that a woman’s value lies in how her body looks? Can selfies empower young girls and build their confidence? Can the items in the background of the bathroom selfie have significance to the character of the producer of the selfie? In other words, is the bathroom selfie beneficial in terms of empowerment in sexuality and self-confidence for young girls as argued by the liberated women of the postfeminism era; Or is the selfie really just a subversive tool of male empowerment in a patriarchal society that objectify young girl’s body parts, leading to commodification and psychoanalytical problems of objectification, as stated by feminist scholars of modernism feminism

2) Does sexual freedom continue to exploit the female’s body in this generation of social media?? Will the new technology of the internet amplify sexual double standards?

3) What impacts do compliments or likes, or the absence of either have on the creator? Who is in control and power in the production of the bathroom selfie? Do girls react differently than males to selfies?

4) What can be the consequences of a selfie gone bad? Are celebrities the right role model for the young females? Are selfies really private or public spaces?

**Literature Review**

**Selfie definition and relations**

The selfie is both private and public. Aaron Hess in his article, The Selfie Assemblage, defines the selfie as “a form of self-portraiture typically created by using smartphones, or
webcams and shared on social networks, (which)... has rapidly risen into the common visual vernacular and seems to accent a culture “obsessed with itself” (Hess 1629). The selfie expresses an identity or a need of an identity for oneself, as well as a desire to belong and be a part of a group like Facebook or Instagram, where they can connect and become part of a public group of semi-friends or acquaintances. Their function has a large social impact on the contemporary culture, that can be enlightening and problematic at the same time. Hess says that the selfie is not a new concept. Selfies are representations like self-portraits which painters have specialized in for hundreds of years. Aesthetically selfies are like photographs, but they have stricter compositional requirements. The face is the main focus and is separate from the background. The difference between a photograph and a selfie is that the photographer is the subject and the creator, while bathroom selfie offers nudity or partial exposure of body parts displayed in a seductive manner.

Pro feminists 2nd wave opinions-Articles against bathroom selfies for teenagers

Sue Jackson and Sarah Goddard present the hyper sexy representation and look into commodification of the female through these bathroom selfies in their research paper, “I’d say 14 is too young: Pre-teen girls’ negotiations of “sexualized media.” This paper examines the way celebrities influence preteen girls by giving them a version of femininity full of porno type chic styling. The media has a big sexualizing effect on young girls and shakes up a panic around the world. ‘sexualizing’ effects of such media on girls. As consumers of celebrity ‘sexiness,’ girls are discursively caught between a postfeminist ‘empowerment’ discourse, accomplished through sexuality, and a ‘sexualized child’ discourse that disempowers through vulnerability and sexual innocence. How then are girls negotiate their consumption of postfeminist popular culture as subjects who are ideally constituted as sexual innocents?” (Jackson, Goddard). The article
examines how teen girls in New Zealand make sense of the “hyper sexy” performances of celebrities by analyzing two studies’ focus group material where the girls talked about representations of music stars celebrities.

Another article that supports the modernist feminism is “Awaken your incredible: Love your body discourses and postfeminist contradictions” by Rosalind Gill and Ana Sollis Elias. In this paper young girls are encouraged to love their bodies and respect themselves, not worrying what others tell you to do. They feel that postfeminist women’s encouragement of teenagers to freely show nudity in their selfies is not considering the reasons the girls are posting bathroom selfies. Are these girls trying to be like their role models’ celebrities, so they can be beautiful for men, or to be popular at the risk of losing their self-identity.

**Post-Feminism support for bathroom selfies for Young girls**

In the paper “Our Bodies, Online, “ Winant Carmen talks on how the 2nd wave of feminist’s desire to achieve equality became exclusive, limiting, and problematic. She supports the rights for all females to be able to use their bodies anyway they want. In the articles we see new modern photograph of bathroom selfies showing nudity is shot for art shows to make a statement. Empowerment is in the hands of the producer not the male receiver. She believes there is nothing wrong with a bathroom selfie. It a fun and self-expressive presentation that should be respected by all.

In Ringrose article Post-feminism refers to the beliefs that all battles for gender equality are over and that because equality between women and men has been achieved, any woman’s failure to succeed is a failure of the individual, not a consequence of systemic barriers (Ringrose et al. 2013).
In the research paper, “Why we post selfies: Understanding motivations for posting pictures of oneself.,” the authors Sung, Judgable, Kim, and Choi studied motivations of selfies. “They identified the motivations that drive selfie-posting behavior and examined the roles of the selfie-posting motivations and narcissism in predicting selfie-posting behavior. The four motivations for posting selfies on social Media are (1) attention seeking, (2) communication, (3) archiving, and (4) entertainment. Further, results showed that the motivations of attention seeking, communication, and archiving as well as narcissism significantly predicted selfie-posting intentions, while narcissism was the only significant predictor of selfie-posting frequency.” (Sung, Judgable, Kim, Choi).

The next essay I analyzed for my project Grant Bollmer makes an attempt to define the selfie as more than a representation of a body in study of the “Phenomenology of the Selfie. “He says, “A selfie does not depict the self. It does not document the self. A selfie makes the self, and it performs the self through a technical, visual distinction that differentiates the self from the environment, which is rendered as background” (Bollmer).

**Theories for discussion with selfies**

Next, I researched the objectification theory and representation theory to understand the sexuality of being a young female in a society of male dominance and inequitable of gender stereotypes that have defined sexuality in the past and today. “Objectification theory (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997) provides a framework to understand the effects of being female in a society that sexually objectifies women’s bodies. According to this theory, objectification takes place when an individual’s body is regarded independently from that of the individual. In other words, objectification occurs any time a woman’s body, body parts, or sexual functions are evaluated apart from the woman herself and treated as if they were representative of the woman
as an individual. Sexual objectification of women’s bodies may be enacted in a multitude of ways, including the objectifying gaze, or visual inspection of the body, and unsolicited sexually evaluative commentary” (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997; Feltman & Szymanski et al. 2017).

How Technology works with selfies

In the book, In the womb of Her Own, Cixous, a famous French feminist, four decades ago, called for women to “honor their bodies.” Now 40 years later a new technology has come to challenge her cry. As Ellen Toronto says “Technology is not neutral. It creates more intense and prolonged degrees of contact between peers. It facilitates the visual objectification of bodies via the creation, exchange, ranking, and displaying of image…Boys’ and girls’ bodies are treated differently, and technology can amplify sexual double standards.

The authors Sloop and Gunn in the article “Status control San Admonition Concerning the Publicized Privacy of Social Networking,” state that “new media technologies and practices promote techniques of surveillance and discipline in part by encouraging participants to confuse their public statements with private expressions” (Sloop & Gunn 289). This article questions the ways and reasons young women become so addicted to the selfie concept. The new generation’s infatuation with social media shows individuals compelled to express immediate emotions and thoughts through performance of their self and the connection of the space around them without a second thought to the consequences to the surveillance aspects of their actions. That is what has happened with the new generation in their productions of selfies which they post on or Instagram.

When taking selfies people are advertising their bodies and naming their location and events of their lives in both private and public places. This is where the publicized privacy term comes from. “The “immediate” ecstasy that comes from breaking rules “encourages a kind of
“blindness” to the consequences of publicized privacy. Our culture seems to encourage that we should be directly seen” (Hess). That’s when privacy of our information can easily be invaded and misrepresented. “Facebook ...allows you to find out a lot of information about a person without even having them know you were inquiring about them” (Andrejevic 399).

In the scholarly paper, “The Discipline of Watching : Detection, Risk, and Lateral Surveillance,” Andrejevic states that “The enhanced freedom to make and sustain new forms of interpersonal connections comes with increased individual responsibility for managing the potential risks of such interactions.” (Andrejevic 399). In other words, it’s better to be aware of how easily your private information can be obtained and used not just by jealous boyfriends or online predators, but by governments and marketing companies, who can obtain your personal information and use it through surveillance of these sites for unfavorable purpose. “Finally snapping that selfie articulates a sense of self that is read to be authentic, but that also displays the uncertainty and fragmentation of self in contemporary societies, including the many desires and burdens of body image politics” (Hess 1643). Lateral surveillance is one way to monitor and help new generations learn responsibility with the use of the Selfie.

The male gender hierarchy stereotypes in our culture, that 2nd wave feminists in the 70s fought so hard to change are still controlling the game. Our culture drives this gender norm of our society through mediated images and textual discourse. “In general, stereotypes of men in the

Methodology

I will draw on two different methods of multimodal analysis in order to show two different feminist belief system (one 2nd wave feminism and the other, post-feminism) which both will be applied to the scenarios of the young girls shooting bathroom selfies and posting them on Instagram in a semiotic image-based way. Which is used in visual texts. Analyzing the way, the
visual signs and looks and how the beliefs work to guide the understanding. Next, I will draw on a feminist discourse analysis to look at the way empowerment is shown from the female’s point of view and the male’s point of view. Then I will compare the gender stereotypes and how they relate to the sexual connotation of the bathroom selfie. Commodity analysis will next be used to show how the female body is a commodity for sexual pleasure of the male public. The other analysis I will draws on will be the positioning and male and female gaze that shows power and importance in the selfie itself and in the background of the bathroom.

In researching I found several surveys and analysis done involving young females on Bathroom selfies and sexism in some of the scholarly papers discussed in this paper. I also have found and will continue looking into stats comparing male likes vs. female likes on each artifact. I will analyze each scholarly report and bring together the information from the teenagers answers that other to formulate answers and show statistics to support the different views presented over selfie productions. If possible, I would like to make a questionnaire to three age groups of females. One for girls ages 10-12, another for 13 to 17, and last a group of 18-24. And ask them questions about their knowledge of feminist beliefs and sexuality. I would hope to find out if those who had feminist beliefs would have more empowerment and better self-esteem when rejection or male objectivity toward then occurred. To see if age should be a factor in a decision to post a selfie.

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