

Be your #selfie: Emerging adults' identity expression through selfies

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Since humans found the capacity to be creative, they have drawn, carved and painted about themselves in order to leave their mark in the world (Rettberg, 2014).

Aim of this Research Study

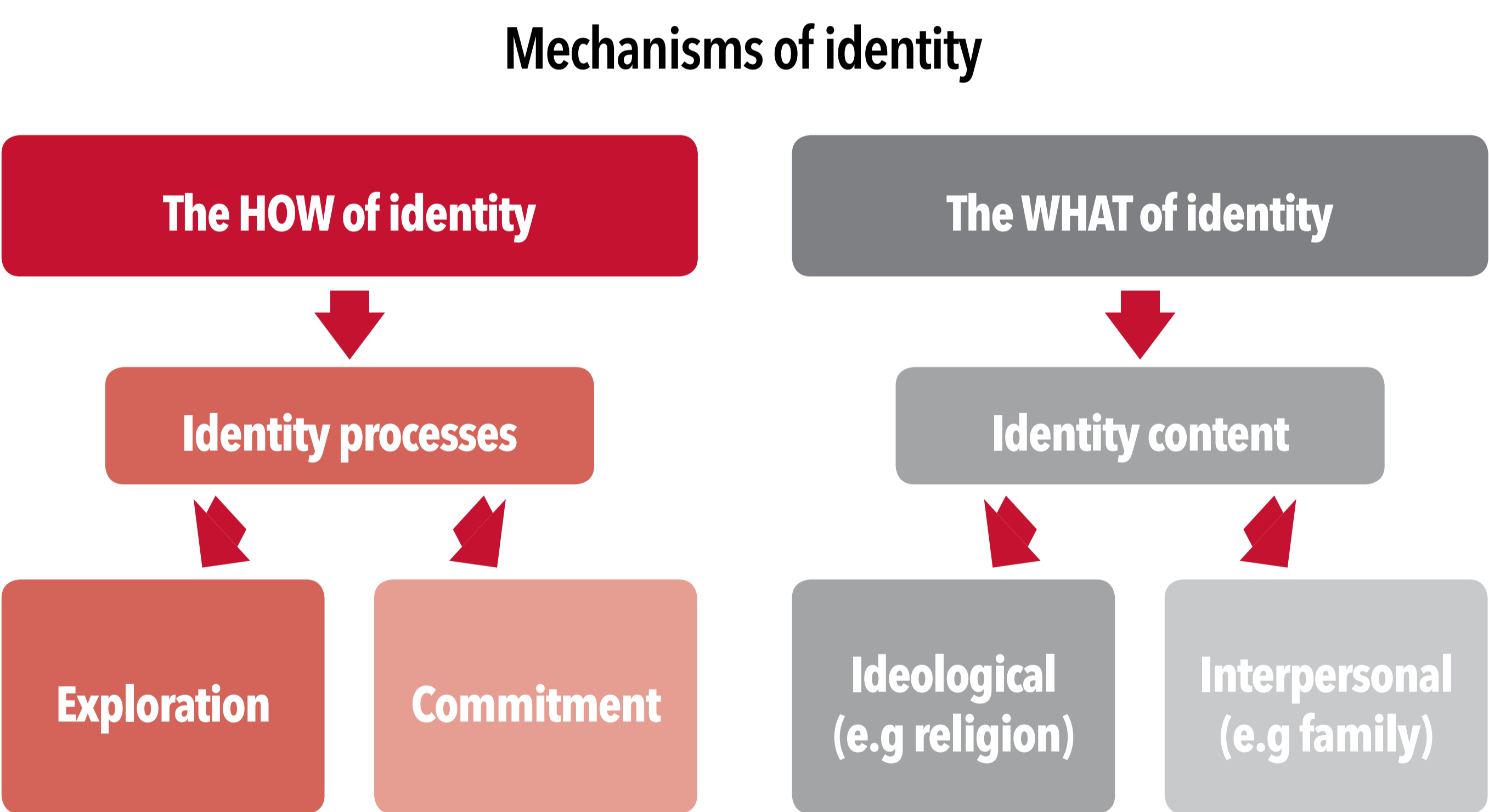
The aim of this study was to explore and describe how selfies are being used to explore identity amongst emerging adults.

Theoretical framework

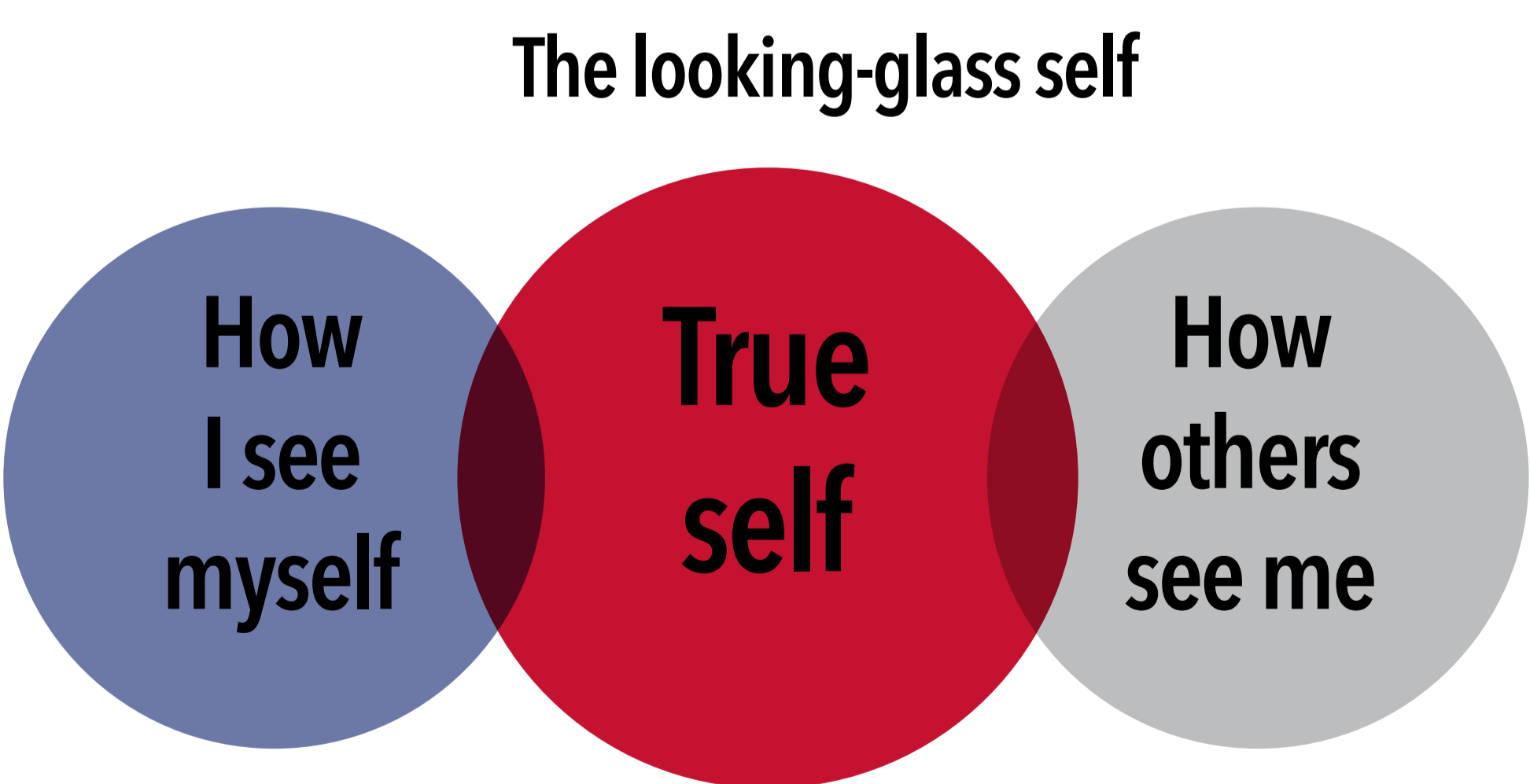
SELFIE = “A self-portrait made in a reflective object or from arm’s length” (Tiidenberg & Gómez Cruz, 2015, p. 2)

Social media presents emerging adults with the opportunity to explore different identities, and to obtain immediate feedback.

- Identity is developed through...
- = exploring in digital format.
 - = presenting the ideal self.
 - = interpreting feedback.
 - = constructing and reconstructing.



Crocetti et al., 2013; Erikson, 1968, Marcia, 1966; Luyckx et al., 2006; McLean et al., 2016).



(Cooley, 1964; Goffman, 1959; Luan et al., 2018; Zhao, 2005)

Research Methods

- Paradigm:** Social constructionism.
Approach: Qualitative.
Design: Explorative and descriptive.
Participants: Eight South African emerging adults engaged in taking and posting of selfies.
Data collection: Two mini focus groups (Githaiga, 2014; McLafferty, 2004).
Analytic strategies: Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Interview Schedule

Participants were asked to reflect on their selfie taking habits, and how the activity of selfie taking may be connected to their identity.

Introductory questions

- How do you experience your stage of life?
- Can you describe some of the challenges that you have experienced in this life stage?
- What is identity to you?
- What are some of the experiences / challenges that you deal with in finding yourself?

Main questions

- How many selfies do you take a day? When? Where?
- What do you think your selfies say about you?
- Are your selfies directly related to how you feel about yourself?
- Do you feel that your selfies carry some type of meaning to you personally?
- How do you think taking selfies is incorporated in your identity?

Follow up questions

- What or who do you include in your selfies?
- Is taking selfies part of your daily routine; is it something that has to happen everyday?
- Do you think that selfies do more good or more harm?
- Do you think that taking selfies is somehow connected to your self esteem or your image?

Results

THEMES	PARTICIPANT QUOTES
The Journey from Adolescence to Adulthood is filled with transitions, challenges, and change	<i>...you have to balance out your academic, your love life, your relationships with friends and family; you have to balance it out completely... So keeping relationships is very difficult...</i>
Selfie content: Significant others, important activities, culture, political statements	<i>I am proudly South African.. ... most of my selfies include ... things that I am mostly involved in... activism my family ... my culture...</i>
Decisions about how to present oneself Which Moment to Capture in Time Is the person in the picture you?	<i>Ja I'll just, I'll just take until I'm satisfied with that pic, with one picture. .. how I view myself or like to be viewed.. ... When we take a photo of ourselves we show people like, this is how I want to be looked at, so we kinda like altering the mirror's state, so it's just the next evolution of the mirror....</i>
Putting it out there – Hoping for feedback	<i>Ja, you need to want to get at least more than a 100 likes on Instagram... I post a picture and...the most likes I get on that picture is at least 45, 46. Then I am like, no, this picture isn't good enough...</i>

In Conclusion

- Selfies are used as a way of communication and self-presentation.
- Identity is explored and adjusted based on the positive or negative feedback received.
- Identity content were mostly interpersonal (family and friends), but also ideological (political activism).
- In accordance with the looking glass theory: Selfie taker's perception of self + Views of the social media universe = True identity

References available on request