Opportunities and Challenges for Transgender People in Digital Spaces

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Understanding the challenges inherent in digital spaces for trans people, and addressing this gap in the literature, can lead to more inclusive design for digital spaces.

Inclusive design involves:
- Combatting online harassment.
- Supporting multiple identities and pseudonyms.

Researchers can:
- Identify how digital spaces currently, and can in the future, serve vulnerable populations rather than further marginalizing them.
- Help designers of online spaces to understand how to design to embrace, rather than constrain, trans people and others with changing or faceted identities.

Opportunities

Access to information and support
- In ways not possible pre-Internet
- Allows people to more easily navigate transitions
- Resources around trans healthcare, legal support, coming out, and more
- Support communities

Arenas for identity exploration
- Appearance, name, and gender presentation often flexible attributes online
- Identity exploration possible without many of the barriers present in physical world

Political organization
- Trans activism more effective online
- Internet reduces barriers to mobilization
- Allows tools and organizing strategies

Challenges

Online harassment
- Trans people especially vulnerable to online harassment
- Including but not limited to: threats, hate speech, offensive or ignorant reactions to trans identity disclosure
- No existing research in this area

Expectation of singular identity
- Many online spaces expect singular, static identity
- Often makes presenting trans identity difficult

Self-presentation difficulties
- Much has been done to address self-presentation difficulties, such as Facebook gender options
- Yet binary gender categories are still programmed into Facebook and other sites

Disclosure difficulties
- Disclosing trans identity on social media is challenging
- Often must come out to everyone at once, or create multiple accounts to manage trans identity disclosure
- Many turn to sites that allow multiple and pseudonymous identities, to engage in identity exploration and to find support and resources

References: