

Picture perfect?

Young women's practice around selfies

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Picture perfect?

Outline

- **Who am I?/Who are we?**
- **What are we doing?**
- **Why are we doing it?**
- **What have we found out?**
- **What will we do next?**
- **Questions and comments**

Who am I?/Who are we?

- **Dr Rose Capdevila: Open University**
 - **Dr Lisa Lazard: Open University**
 - **Dr Charlotte Dann: University of Northampton**
 - **Prof Abigail Locke: University of Bradford**
 - **Dr Sandra Roper: University of Bedford**
- and others...

What are we doing?

- the ways in which we use the technologies of social media to curate who we are both on and off line – particularly girls and women

AND

- how identities become produced through the taking and posting of images online

OEDs word of the year 2013

A photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically one taken with a smartphone or webcam and uploaded to a social media website

OEDs word of the year 2013

A photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically one taken with a smartphone or webcam and uploaded to a social media website:

“occasional selfies are acceptable, but posting a new picture of yourself everyday isn’t necessary”

The Oscar Selfie



Why are we doing it?

Gillian Rose (2012) describes photography as:

- predominantly understood as a technology for capturing 'true' representations of reality
- construed as a site for visual play

Current research online lives

“It seems that for many, creating and networking online content is becoming an integral means of managing one’s identity, lifestyle and social relations.”

Livingstone (2008: 394)

Current research

Computing science

- Selfie as a technological accomplishment
- Focus on identifying/providing resource

Communications studies

- Selfie as cultural artefact
- Social practices

Current research

Psychology

- **Focus on relationship with personality variables**
- **The Dark Triad with respect to men**
- **Narcissism / self esteem for women**
- **Implicitly pathologises selfie posters?**

Current research

Research is international as well as culturally and generationally diverse

Research has consistently identified gendered and generational patterns in selfie posting

(e.g. Dhir et al., 2016; Sorokowska et al., 2016)

Current research

Women are:

- **displayed in a greater number of photos than men**
- **tagged in photos with much greater frequency than men**
- **report untagging themselves, citing dissatisfaction with their appearance as the primary reason**

(Pemrek et al, 2009)

Current research

Research in Social Psychology has indicated women encouraged to:

- **view themselves from outsider's perspective**
- **produce themselves in line with normative beauty standards**
- **understand themselves as a ongoing 'betterment' project**

These are all shaped by the parameters of social acceptability

(Blood 2005; Tischner, 2013)₁₄

Current research

Self improvement tied to:

- **Western individualism**

(Stuart & Donaghue, 2012; Livingstone & Sefton-Green, 2016)

- **Requirement to be self branding and entrepreneurial**

(Rettberg, 2016)

- **Responsible for their bodies as 'good citizens'**

(Tischner, 2013)₁₅

Current research

Does social media provide:

a space for new,
empowered and
autonomous
meanings of girl/
womanhood?

OR

a site of surveillance
putting pressure on
girls/women to
reproduce feminine
identities in markedly
narrow ways?

What have we found out?

Three approaches to collecting data:

- 1. Group interviews**
- 2. Q methodology**
- 3. Processual selfie completion**

1: Group interviews

Group interviews

- Young women 18-25
- Reported practices and experiences of taking, enhancing, posting and audiencing selfies
- Audio recorded and transcribed verbatim
- Thematic analysed with attention to some discursive features

Key points of interest

- Issues of 'authenticity'
- Relationship of off and online lives

1: Group interviews

P1: When I do it [take selfies]with my niece cos she's got really blue eyes, sometimes in the lighting you can't see it and I like everyone to see how blue her eyes are so I put a filter on it that makes them stand out more and it's really cute. It's not that they're not that blue in real life it's just you can't see it in the photo it's just like...

1: Tonr



With Tonr



Without Tonr



1: Tonr



2: Q Methodology

- **developed by William Stephenson (1935)**
- **more recently described by**
 - **Steven R. Brown (1980)**
 - **Watts & Stenner (2015)**
- **used to study subjective, or contestable, issues.**

2: *Q sorting*

Participants:

- 27 women
- between 18 and 23 (mean age of 20.6)

Sorted:

- 47 statements
- from most agree to least agree
- quasi-normal distributed grid from +5 to -5.

2: Statistical Analysis

- **PCA with Varimax rotation**
- **7 factors (> 1 eigenvalue)**
- **Explained 71% of the variance**
- **Weighted averages used to reconstruct exemplifying sorts**
- **Taps into patterns or, what have been called, 'understandings', 'perspectives' or 'narratives' that are prevalent in our culture (see also Stainton Rogers, 1995).**

2: Factors

- 1. Presenting...Me!**
- 2. I am what I am**
- 3. Sharing is Caring**
- 4. The In-crowd – Beautiful and Popular**

2: Findings

- 1. Presenting...Me!**
- 2. I am what I am**
- 3. Sharing is Caring**
- 4. The In-crowd – Beautiful and Popular**

While narcissism did play a part in how selfies were understood – this was very closely interwoven, and contextualised through relationality

3: Selfie completion

- **Brings together photo-elicitation with story completion**
- **Participants asked to take and process selfies *in situ***
- **Discussion grounded in their practice**
- **Interest in procedure itself: the order and timing of each step, and the discussion from beginning to end**

3: Selfie completion

I could use the camera app or I've actually got a range of other photo apps that add different filters and effects...then I would hold it up, get the right angle so I've got the light going directly onto my face so there aren't any inconsistencies in my skin or shadows across my face... (from 1.00m – 2.20m)

Discussion

Aaron Hess (2015) has argued that, the selfie is an assemblage that is constituted through four overlapping elements at least.

- **Self**
- **Place**
- **Device**
- **Network**

They may often be staged they are still trying to say something 'real' about the person posting them

Discussion

Online life shows us at our 'best' but how women feel about this is much more complex than simply being narcissistic or inauthentic.

However simple the selfie might seem, we must acknowledge that how they are being used and understood can tell us about the complex and nuanced social worlds in which young women go about their everyday lives.

What will we do next?



Thank you?



Questions, Comments, Suggestions?

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<http://fass.open.ac.uk/research/groups/networking-families>