A steady stream of tourists stroll beneath Chicago's Cloud Gate sculpture with their necks craned upward toward the dizzying convex reflections on its chrome-colored surface. Each step around the sculpture feels like an interaction with a mirrored kaleidoscope that distorts and manipulates reflections of the city's skyline and inhabitants. When tourists approach the sculpture to look for their reflection in the chaos of other moving figures, they wave colorful umbrellas or jump up and down to make their reflection more noticeable. One man throws his red baseball cap in the air to find himself. Others call out to no one in particular, "Where am I?" and scan the rounded edges of the sculpture for themselves. Once found, they move toward their reflection, eyes transfixed as they watch their likeness grow larger and more distorted until finally they can reach out and touch their mirrored image. Others stand captivated at the number of times they are reflected. One man counts 15 repeated images of himself. For many tourists, this process of finding oneself is only complete after taking a selfie of and with themselves. One mother traveling with her young toddler lugs around a selfie-tripod, carefully balancing the five-foot stick against her child's stroller before running into the picture to pose with her giggling daughter. She then returns back to her phone and examines the image before repeating the process with a new pose. Moments later, a man traveling by himself unfurls a selfie-stick with a GoPro attached to record video. He does a quick march around the sculpture with the camera rolling before taking several selfie still images, each with his head slightly tilted up and a tough look on his face.

These tourists' behaviors at Cloud Gate are not unique. In just a few short years, tourist sites around the world have become havens for selfie-takers. They eagerly document every

aspect of their travels to share their adventures with friends and family on ever-expanding social networking sites.

But smartphones and selfies are not only reserved for leisure travelers. Migrants and refugees who flee their homes in search of safety or new opportunities are also harnessing selfie communication, but in ways that are distinct from tourists. In fact, the greatest smartphone growth is driven by markets in the developing world, with sales increasing over 15% in each of the last two years.[1]

News photographers sent to document Syrian refugees' harrowing journeys often photograph the increasingly common site of a refugee pulling out their smartphone to snap a selfie. "Celebratory selfies," as they have come to be known, feature smiling refugees just feet from the shore with their small boats in the background. Others show them wrapped in blankets at refugee camps awaiting food or medical care.[2] Many of these selfies are then shared with their friends and family via social media as proof of their safe arrival. There are also several refugee-specific Facebook groups with thousands of members, whose posted selfies help inform and motivate others who wish to make the journey.[3]

The simultaneous rise in popularity of Snapchat—a mobile app that lets users instantly send ephemeral photos to followers and friends with text or animations overlaid—and the

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[1]"Gartner Says Emerging Markets Drove Worldwide Smartphone Sales to 15.5 Percent Growth in Third Quarter of 2015." November 18, 2015. Accessed April 12, 2016. http://www.gartner.com/newsroom/id/3169417.

[2]McAteer, Ollie. "Refugees Are Taking Celebratory Selfies to Mark the Beginning of a New Life." Metro UK, September 7, 2015. Accessed April 12, 2016. http://metro.co.uk/2015/09/07/refugees-are-taking-celebratory-selfies-as-they-mark-the-beginning-of-a-new-life-5379030/.

[3]Alter, Lloyd. "People Are Outraged to See Refugees with Smartphones. They Shouldn't Be." Mother Nature Network, September 8, 2015. Accessed March 7, 2016. http://www.mnn.com/green-tech/gadgets-electronics/blogs/people-are-outraged-see-refugees-smartphones-they-shouldnt-be.

democratization of smartphones suggests selfies are becoming a language of their own. Both trends indicate profound changes in how we communicate with one another.

Comparison of differences and similarities in selfie behaviors practiced by tourists and by refugees, indicates a contrasting tension. Are the rise of selfies a new form of shorthand communication within specific communities, or are selfies an expression of narcissism driven by a cult of celebrity? This tension seeps into critical discourse that tends toward lopsided or polarized views. But the hand-wringing in media articles and cable news dominates the popular debate with theories admonishing the rise of public displays of gratuitous narcissism.

The rapid worldwide spread of selfies and its intergenerational and intercultural appeal suggests a more complex movement than what media depicts. The wide variety of uses and motivations for taking selfies often reveal unique differences in cultural, social and class distinctions that inform our understanding for the future of interpersonal digital communications. Examining these differences shows that what once started as an embarrassing but tolerated fad has developed into a major form of communication that is changing how we connect with one another and how we view ourselves.

* * *

"I feel like it's the discovery of the mirror all over again," Biata Gonzalez said after framing up a selfie with the Golden Gate Bridge on a sunny September afternoon in San Francisco. Gonzalez was one of dozens of tourists that afternoon who took numerous selfies with the bridge before the infamous fog rolled across the bay to obscure the view of the iconic structure. "It's like we're seeing ourselves again for the first time," she added.[4] Like the tourists

[4] "Biata Gonzalez" In-person interview by author. September 10, 2015

at the Cloud Gate structure in Chicago, Gonzalez experimented with several poses and facial gestures before leaving the tourist site satisfied with her selfie.

Though the rise and ubiquity of selfies seems sudden, the historical roots of the modern selfie can be traced back to the Greek myth of Narcissus, who saw his mirrored reflection in a pool of water and fell in love. Contrary to common understanding of the myth, Narcissus didn't fall in love with himself. Instead, he saw the person looking back at him as someone greater than himself, an idealized version and an extended identity he wanted to imitate.[5]

The ubiquity of travel selfies on social networking sites creates a modern version of Narcissus' pool, where users are all looking into a digital reflection of themselves and their lifestyle. This reflection of self-curated content is meant to project a positive and controlled depiction of the profile owner that may not have much basis in reality.[6] In the specific case of the travel selfie, users often upload content highlighting their sense of adventure and exuding a casual, carefree attitude to emphasize a life lived with authenticity and spontaneity. However, watching them in action appears anything but spontaneous. Though selfie sticks and new smartphone cameras offer ever wider views for selfie-takers, users frequently manipulate angles and distances in an attempt to capture the most flattering selfie possible.

This isn't so different from how traditional entertainment media portrays celebrities on the covers of magazines. But since average users provide the content for social networks, populist appeal makes the portrayals seem more credible than traditional media.[7] Even though

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[5] McLuhan, Marshall. Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man. 1994.

[6] Kim, Yoonkyung, and Young Min Baek. "When Is Selective Self-Presentation Effective? An Investigation of the Moderation Effects of "Self-Esteem" and "Social Trust"." *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking* 17, no. 11 (2014): 697-701.

[7]Seong Ok Lyu, "Travel selfies on social media as objectified self-presentation", Tourism Management, Volume 54, June 2016, Pages 185-195, ISSN 0261-5177,

users appear self-aware that they are portraying and viewing a glamorized version of their life, they seem seduced into believing these branded self images anyway.

The carefully crafted and self-curated travel selfie has become so ubiquitous that it spawned a parody Instagram account called Socality Barbie—which has since been parodied—that garnered over a million followers in 2015.[8] The account featured a Barbie in various locations and poses with subtly mocking captions and hashtags. The user who created the parody account, Darby Cisneros, revealed her identity the same day that she suspended the account, claiming she accomplished her goal of social commentary.

"The life that's portrayed through Instagram doesn't look anything like the one they are actually living," Darby Cisneros, a Portland, Oregon-based wedding photographer, said.[9] "It all seems so fake now, and I'm trying to use this as a platform or use a Barbie as my way to express that," Cisneros said.[10]

There have been several other high-profile Instagram users who reveal their behind-the-scenes methods to push back against what they see as a projection of a filtered reality lacking in authenticity. Most notably this pushback comes from working professional female models who confess to projecting a digital life far more glamorous than real life.[11]

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http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2015.11.001.(http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0261517715300388)

[8] "Socality Barbie (@socalitybarbie) • Instagram Photos and Videos." Socality Barbie (@socalitybarbie) • Instagram Photos and Videos. Accessed February 23, 2016. https://www.instagram.com/socalitybarbie/.

[9]Scott, Ellen. "Hipster Barbie Has Revealed Her True Identity and Quit Instagram." Metro Hipster Barbie Has Revealed Her True Identity and Quit Instagram Comments. November 05, 2015. Accessed February 23, 2016. http://metro.co.uk/2015/11/05/hipster-barbie-has-revealed-her-true-identity-and-quit-instagram-5481810/.

[10]Dowling, Jennifer. "Portlander Breaks Internet with Socality Barbie." KOIN 6. September 05, 2015. Accessed February 23, 2016. http://koin.com/2015/09/05/portlander-breaks-internet-with-socality-barbie/.

[11] Hunt, Elle. "Essena O'Neill Quits Instagram Claiming Social Media 'is Not Real Life'" The Guardian, November 3, 2015. Accessed February 23, 2016. http://www.theguardian.com/media/2015/nov/03/instagram-star-essena-oneill-quits-2d-life-to-reveal-true-story-behind-images.

In a since-deleted 22-minute video rant on her YouTube channel, Essena O'Neill, a professional teenage Australian model and Instagram sensation who earned thousands of dollars marketing products on her account, made a dramatic critique of social media culture which she called "not real life."[12] Her rant corresponded with a photo-by-photo re-editing of her Instagram account, where she replaced original captions and hashtags with more honest—in some cases scathing—descriptions of how the image was captured. In one re-edited caption beneath a seemingly candid moment of herself laughing she wrote, "This has no purpose. No purpose in a forced smile, tiny clothes and being paid to look pretty." Beneath another photo of her in a scant bikini she wrote, "For this photo I hardly ate for a week. I posed for hours until the photo was perfect." Finally, she warns, "Don't be fooled by social media."[13]

But for refugees and migrants who arrive daily on the shores of Lesbos, Greece, their selfie-taking behavior has no intent to conceal or manipulate reality.[14] Though the visual nature of their selfies may look similar to travel selfies, the communicative effect is opposite. Instead of distorting reality, they have strong motivations to represent their situation truthfully. For many people fleeing war-torn countries, the selfie is their only means of validated communication with friends and family back home. A selfie taken from the shore showing a smiling refugee family or group of friends is not a strategy to mislead others as O'Neill's social media images did. Instead this type of selfie offers the most instantaneous method of documenting a safe arrival after a dangerous journey. It also enables refugees to convey through visual gestures or expressions

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[12]How to Make 1000s on Instagram. Performed by Essena O'Neill. YouTube. November 19, 2015. Accessed March 2, 2016. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zKhlUprSpms.
[13]O'Neill, Essena. "Essena O'Neill Instagram." Instagram. November 18, 2015. Accessed March 2, 2016. https://www.instagram.com/p/-N519ijL-N/?taken-by=essenaoneill&hl=en.
[14]Laurent, Olivier. "See How Refugees Use Selfies to Document Their Journey."TIME Magazine, October 8, 2015. Accessed April 5, 2016. http://time.com/4064988/refugee-crisis-selfies/.

bonds or nuances of meaning that may be lost over telephone or in written text messages. This adds a phatic dimension of communication in an emotional situation even if their smiles aren't from genuine happiness.

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The act of capturing and recording a self-portrait to promote an idealized version of self or for pure documentation isn't unique to modern smartphone users. Classical artists through the centuries also experimented extensively with self-portraiture, most notably Vincent Van Gogh and Rembrandt Van Rijn, who used "selfies" to explore their identity but also to establish their brand and to promote themselves to art buyers.[15] Rembrandt created more than 80 self-portraits, with some art historians attributing as many as 120 to him.[16]

Photographers began taking selfies almost as soon as the photographic process was invented. Robert Cornelius, an amateur chemist and photography enthusiast, produced a daguerreotype of himself in 1839, just months after Louis Daguerre unveiled his photo-making process.[17] In the post-modern era of photography, photographer and artist Cindy Sherman famously photographed herself beginning in the 1970s as a variety of different identities and personas, using elaborate costumes or makeup to explore representations of societal stereotypes, especially those of white women as seen in movies. Although her images are self-portraits, they differ from those of most other artists and photographers because she is not the subject of the image even though she is photographing herself. Certainly most modern selfies like those seen

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[15]Rosenberg, Jakob. Rembrandt, Life and Work. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980.
[16]Rothenberg, Albert. "Rembrandt's Creation of the Pictorial Metaphor of Self."Metaphor and Symbol 23, no. 2 (March 31, 2008): 108-29. Accessed February 29, 2016. Taylor Francis Online.
[17]Becker, David. "Pioneering Photographer Robert Cornelius Credited With World's First Selfie C. 1839." Petapixel. December 05, 2013. Accessed April 12, 2016. http://petapixel.com/2013/12/05/pioneering-photographer-robert-cornelius-credited-worlds-first-selfie/.

at tourist sites lack the intentionality and insight of Sherman's vision and artistic intellect. But her search for identity—who or what is Cindy Sherman?—has parallels with modern selfie culture and its frequent crisis of identity and performance that leads to questions of authenticity. [18]

Even socialite Kim Kardashian's perceived narcissism isn't without precedent. After the recent release of her 300-page book of selfies—titled *Self-ish*—historians were quick to remind Kardashian's admonishers that Germany's Matthäus Schwartz had her beat by 500 years when he published what is believed to be the first book of fashion selfies.[19]

The book, *Klaidungsbüchlein*, which translates to "the book of clothes," features male fashion in the mid-1500s and illustrates how Schwartz leveraged his political and social status through what he wore. Schwartz used the depiction of his finely crafted and expensive clothes as a way to project his social status and importance—much the same way Kardashian uses her lack of clothes to garner attention and fame.

The critique of self-portraiture and linking it to narcissism isn't new either. In 1859, French art critic Charles Baudelaire expressed deep ambivalence toward photography and its popularity, believing it commodified art and made people into self-interested consumers. He lamented, "a foul society has flung itself, like Narcissus, to gaze at its trivial image on metal."[20]

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Part of what differentiates modern selfies from past self-portraiture is the selfie's public nature, which hints that we are using our selfies for purposes other than humanistic or artistic

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[18]Sherman, Cindy. "MoMA | Cindy Sherman." Museum of Modern Art. Accessed April 12, 2016. http://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2012/cindysherman/#/1/.

[19] Chrisman-Cambell, Kimberly. "The Original Book of Selfies." Atlantic Monthly, November 15, 2015. Accessed February 4, 2016. http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2015/11/first-book-fashion-selfie-king/413047/.

[20]Baudelaire, Charles, and Jonathan Mayne. The Mirror of Art: Critical Studies. Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1956.

pursuits. While Rembrandt and Sherman publicly distributed and exhibited their self-portraits, they created them in a private space. The modern selfie is often public spectacle in both the process of creation and distribution.

"The physical presence of relationship disappears and an electronic relationship becomes demanded," said Barbara Wolbert, a visual culture studies professor at Germany's University of Viadrina. "We are now living our personal life in a public space."[21]

This form of public exhbitionism of what is ostensibly a private moment leads to travelers at tourist sites performing what appears to be an odd ritual.

"Sometimes it really looks stupid," Olga Lishchenko, an 18-year-old student from Saint Petersburg, Russia, said after performing various selfie stunts outside the Louvre in Paris, France. "When I use the stick it makes me feel uncomfortable," Lishchenko said, laughing. Despite her self-conscious feelings, she said she will keep using selfie sticks because of their convenience, mainly that she doesn't have to ask someone else to take the photo. By taking the photo herself she is able to control more variables in the image-making process, leading to a higher likelihood of a flattering photo.

This public act of making travel selfies even influences tourist site infrastructure. At the Four Seasons hotel in Houston, Texas, guests are provided selfie-sticks upon arrival to help them capture a wider viewing angle of themselves while visiting the city's memorable sites. In New York's Times Square, a selfie billboard and interactive kiss cam was installed for travelers to broadcast live video to one of the busiest tourist destinations in the world. At the massive Beach Mall in Dubai, visitors are encouraged to send selfies to be advertised on informational boards

[21] "Barbara Wolbert." Interview by author. January 25, 2016.

throughout the beach to promote the impressive views of the city skyline. While these tourist sites incorporate selfie culture, even using it to advertise the experience, others are moving in the opposite direction. In just the past few years, places like the Smithsonian Museum, the Running of the Bulls Festival, New York zoos, Lake Tahoe and the city of Mecca—to name a few—released statements banning selfie-sticks or installed permanent signs prohibiting visitors from taking selfies.[22]

Wolbert believes this new worldwide ritual of taking selfies is a modern incarnation of Pierre Bourdieu's theory of the "cult of unity" in photography.

Bourdieu was a world-renowned French sociologist, anthropologist and philosopher in the 20th Century who did extensive study into how the act of photographing became an important feature of milestone events and ingrained itself into ritualistic behaviors. A popular example of his theory was the rise of ceremonial photography that often overshadowed the event itself. For instance, whole portions of wedding celebrations became dedicated to photographing the ceremony and those in attendance. This of course changed participant behavior which molded around the presence of a photographer. The desire to photographically record important events thus became its own tradition and ritual, with region-specific customs, expressions and poses. People were therefore "unified" through this shared act and obligation to photograph.[23]

Stand around any major tourist site in the world and one can observe Bourdieu's theory in action. The tourists at these sites appear to elevate the act of taking a selfie above the experience of actually traveling to the famous landmark. These distracted tourists seem to

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[22]Morris Paris, Cody, and Jakob Pietschnig. 'But First, Let Me Take a Selfie': Personality Traits as Predictors of Travel Selfie Taking and Sharing Behaviors. Proceedings of Turning Insights Into Actions ~ the Crucial Role of Tourism Research, Oregon, Portland. Accessed February 4, 2016. http://scholarworks.umass.edu/ttra/ttra2015/Academic_Papers_Oral/1/

[23] Bourdieu, Pierre. Photography, a Middle-brow Art. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990.

participate in a solo dance with their phone: posing, gesturing, laughing and kissing—often oblivious to their surroundings.

Tourists who travel to see the Mona Lisa at the Louvre in Paris often wait over an hour just to get into the museum. Once inside the room that hosts Leonardo Da Vinci's famous painting, they face another 30 to 60 minute wait. When they reach the small 30 by 20-inch painting many visitors turn their back to Mona Lisa's gaze, hoist their smartphone just above their face and take a selfie.

"This is normal now. I see this everyday," Tarik Souidi said of the selfie behavior in front of Da Vinci's iconic portrait of the Mona Lisa. Souidi, a security guard at the Louvre Museum since 2005, has witnessed the astronomical rise in selfies taken. For eight hours each day he is positioned just off to the side of the Mona Lisa to ensure the crowd continues moving along through the museum and that visitors keep a safe distance from the painting. He said selfies with the painting began in 2010, but picked up significantly in 2013 as the popularity of selfie sticks grew. While the Louvre hasn't banned selfie sticks outright, there are particular rooms—like the Mona Lisa room—where visitors are told to put their sticks away. Souidi said this is for the tourists' own safety, joking that, "It hurts when you get hit with a selfie stick." And he notes that tourists are often oblivious to others when swinging their sticks around.[24]

Susan Sontag, a renowned photography critic and intellectual, observed similar tourist behavior in her seminal book *On Photography* published in 1977.

"Picture-taking is an event in itself," Sontag wrote. "And with ever more peremptory rights—to interfere with, to invade, or to ignore whatever is going on."[25] What Sontag described

[24] "Tarik Souidi.." In-person interview by author. March 16, 2016
[25] Sontag, S. On Photography. New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux. 1977

was the common sight of tourists bumbling around attractions and photographing each other or the attraction itself. Though some of the behavior may be the same, selfies introduce new behaviors and an increased level of distractedness in the picture-taking process.

"Things that we do now with our devices are things that only a few years ago we would have found odd or disturbing, but they've quickly begun to seem familiar," said Sherry Turkle, a social studies professor at MIT who specializes in human-technology interaction.[26]

After publishing her book *Alone Together: Why We Expect More From Technology and Less From Each Other* in 2011, Turkle became an outspoken critic of our growing dependence on technology and incessant motivation to share or document every aspect of our lives. She's particularly skeptical of selfie-culture and worries that truncated communication to physically absent entities makes us lonelier and unable to pursue healthy in-person relationships.

Some tourists seem to echo Turkle's concerns and lament being drawn into their phones. But despite this self-awareness they feel an obligation to document their presence at tourist sites.

"I can easily get caught behind my camera or cellphone and not appreciate the moment as much," Kayla Torgerson said. Torgerson is a travel consultant who frequently travels to exotic destinations to help plan once-in-a-lifetime vacations for her clients. "I really notice it when I'm in a place where everyone is trying to take a selfie. You just get the sense that nobody is actually looking at the thing they are seeing, they're just trying to get a picture of it," Torgerson said.[27]

But not everyone agrees that being distracted by taking selfies is a bad thing.

"I hate when people are like, 'You're not living in the moment,'" Annie Meng said while standing near the Eiffel Tower in Paris. A Maryland native who studies art at the Parson's

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[26] Turkle, Sherry. "Connected, but Alone?" TED Talk. 3 Apr. 2012. TED. Web. 4 Feb. 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t7Xr3AsBEK4>.

[27] "Kayla Torgerson." Telephone interview by author. February 9, 2016.

School of Art and Design in New York, Meng added, "I want to remember [the moment], so why not take selfies?"

Even though both Torgerson and Meng recognize the external pressures which make taking—or not taking—a selfie, finding the roots of the motivation behind the behavior remains elusive.

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In an interview with NPR's tech podcast "Note To Self," technology writer Michael Kirn details this phenomenon of being constantly drawn into your phone and integrating your real and online selves.

"There is starting to be a very porous border between my life, my mind, my activities and what is coming through my phone," Kirn said.[28]

He sees the bizarre outgoing behavior of selfie-takers to be driven by lack of privacy expectations and a need to perform for an unseen online audience.

"A generation that is trained to make itself look good on Facebook is converting a certain anxiety it has about its real self being seen into a performance," Kirn said.[29]

Social and psychological research generally confirms Kirn's theory, and suggests selfie behavior is a natural continuation of self-presentation that happens in face-to-face interactions everyday.

Erving Goffman first coined the behavior in his 1959 book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life.* He argued human social interactions were like miniature theatrical performances, where each encounter was a dance between two individuals who sought to control their

[28]Kirn, Michael. "Is My Phone Eavesdropping On Me?" Interview. Note to Self. National Public Radio. November 4, 2015.
[29]Kirn, Michael.

appearance, environment and others' perceptions while gathering information about the other individual.[30] Our motivations to curate our virtual self appear to be identical to how we control our image in physical interactions.

But experts can't seem to agree on motivation.

Turkle believes the motivation for sharing constitutes the confirmation of self-realization and existence, borrowing from Descartes, "I share; therefore I am."[31]

Other psychology experts believe feelings of self-realization are misconceived, because unless a photo goes "viral" our sharing is of very little importance to the world at large.

"The pics and tweets don't actually make us more important, but they create the illusion of importance," Ken Eishold, a psychoanalyst, said in his book *What You Know You Don't Know*.

And yet others find our true motivations murky, to the extent that pinpointing them precisely is impossible.

"It has gotten to the point where you ask people why they take pictures and they can't even say," Marvin Heiferman, a museum curator, said in an interview with *Wired* magazine.[32]

Google reported that its Android users took 93 million selfies per day in 2014.[33] So what happens to all these selfies and why take them?

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[30]Treviño, A. Javier. Goffman's Legacy. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003.
[31] Turkle, Sherry. "Connected, but Alone?"
[32]Brook, Pete. "Photography Is The New Universal Language and It's Changing Everything." Wired, August 20, 2013. Accessed February 29, 2016. http://www.wired.com/2013/08/raw-meet-marvin-heiferman/.
[33]Brandt, Richard. "Google Divulges Numbers at I/O: 20 Billion Texts, 93 Million Selfies and More - Silicon Valley Business Journal." Silicon Valley Business Journal. June 25, 2014. Accessed April 12, 2016. http://www.bizjournals.com/sanjose/news/2014/06/25/google-divulges-numbers-at-i-o-20-billion-texts-93.html.

When asked what motivates her to take and share selfies, Torgerson responded, “I like to document my travels and share my experiences with my family,” because many of them don’t travel, she said.

For some like Torgerson, taking and sharing selfies appears to be the new instant postcard—a digital method of communication that lets your family and friends know you’re thinking of them while traveling or serves as a personal highlight reel for your adventures.

It is no wonder postcard sales declined dramatically just as social networks exploded in popularity. From 2010 to 2014, the U.S. Postal Service processed 46 percent fewer personal postcards.[34]

But what should be made of marginalized communities like refugees’ and their “celebratory selfies?” Besides the obvious contextual differences that these selfies are taken in, the motivations for taking a selfie are also distinct. These selfies are not intended to project social status or self-performance. Instead they offer a simple visual message for a limited—often familial—audience. Though their selfies still beg viewers, “Look at me!” the ultimate goal of the image isn’t for personal or social gain, it is to document survival, safety and progress in a journey toward a goal..

Researchers David Nemer and Guo Freeman at Indiana University discovered similar motivations for taking selfies among residents in Brazil’s slums, or favelas.

The two researchers spent six months in these impoverished areas interviewing smartphone owners and active social media users.

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[34] Jenkins, Mark. "Are Postcards A Thing Of The Past?" Washington Post, February 26, 2015. Accessed February 29, 2016. https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/travel/are-postcards-a-thing-of-the-past/2015/02/26/a243909a-b945-11e4-aa05-1ce812b3fdd2_story.html.

"For marginalized users who are suffering in a relatively severe living environment, selfies are not a shallow way to show narcissism, fashion, and self-promotion .and seek attention; selfies, rather, empower the users to exercise free speech, practice self-reflection, express spiritual purity, improve literacy skills, and form strong interpersonal connections."

Similar to the "celebratory selfies" from Syrian refugees, residents in these impoverished areas take selfies to document their struggles and, after dangerous events occur, their safety.

The Indiana University researchers reflect this difference from travel selfies in an interview with a 17-year-old favela resident.

"Today I had to walk through a shooting in Itararé...I'm just very grateful I'm still alive, but at the same time I'm furious to have to face this situation almost every week," André, 17, said. "Today I posted a photo of myself expressing my gratitude of being alive. . . . I can't say much more than that because I'll have trouble with people involved in this shooting."[35]

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The extant research probing for psychological implications of selfie-culture often leads to contradictory conclusions because how selfies are used on social networking sites varies widely—as demonstrated in the contrast between refugees' selfies and travel selfies. Also complicating our picture of selfie-culture is that research into selfies and social networking sites are relatively new scholarly areas in academia.[36] For instance, the newest research suggests viewing profiles of others makes us unhappy with ourselves, a finding many media outlets

[35]Nemer, David, and Freeman, Guo 2015. "Empowering the Marginalized: Rethinking Selfies in the Slums of Brazil." International Journal Of Communication (19328036) 9, 1832-1847. Communication & Mass Media Complete, EBSCOhost (accessed April 13, 2016).
[36]Konnikova, Maria. "How Facebook Makes Us Unhappy." The New Yorker, September 10, 2013.

quickly pounced on to substantiate negative suspicions about selfies.[37] But other recent research determined that viewing our own profiles seems to have a positive effect.[38] This suggests that perhaps just as Narcissus fell in love with his extended identity, so might we.

Creating an extended identity with selfies, particularly travel selfies, is made easier because of opportunities to digitally manipulate photos and dramatically adjust appearance. With a simple touch, filters can obscure blemishes, darken or lighten skin tone and even shape bodily features like elongating jawbones or widening eyes. Just as Napoleon commissioned artists to render himself taller than he was in reality, anyone with access to smartphone apps can make self-conscious adjustments to create an idealized self.

"You get to know what works best for you, aesthetically," Dijun Wang, a student at Parson's School of Art and Design and a Virginia native, said. Wang spent about ten minutes taking various selfies with his friends around the Champ de Mars in Paris, a park overlooking the Eiffel Tower that is popular with tourists. For one of the selfie photos he chomped on a fresh baguette while one of his friends called out, "make sure you get the whole tower in there!"

"It's just something fun to do, it's silly," Dijun said. "But it helps you be sure of yourself and how to present yourself."[39]

"The selfie is revolutionizing how we gather autobiographical information about ourselves and our friends," Dr. Mariann Hardey, a lecturer at Durham University and social media professional, said. "It's an extension of our natural construction of self. It's about

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[37] Wiederhold, Brenda K. "Three Years Later, Are Other Facebook Users Still "Happier and Having Better Lives Than I Am"?" *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking* 19, no. 1 (2016): 1.
[38] Valenzuela, Sebastián, Namsu Park, and Kerk F. Kee. "Is There Social Capital in a Social Network Site?: Facebook Use and College Students' Life Satisfaction, Trust, and Participation." Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication 14, no. 4 (2009): 875-901.
[39] "Dijun Wang." In-person interview by author. March 18, 2016

presenting yourself in the best way...[similar to] when women put on makeup or men who bodybuild to look a certain way: it's an aspect of performance," Hardey said.[40]

Several studies show that users are motivated to manipulate their images to create a socially desirable depiction of themselves.[41] Surprisingly, users with low self-esteem edit their photos less, mostly because they share on social media at much lower rates than those with high self-esteem.[42] Even though high self-esteem individuals are more likely to adjust their images and post to social media, they report being more dissatisfied with their digital self after not receiving desired feedback from their peers.[43] These studies often become the focus of media articles which categorize selfies as narcissistic, even though there has not been a definitive link between taking selfies and narcissism.[44]

This compulsion to edit and manipulate every aspect of our digital lives is what led to social media critiques from Cisneros and O'Neill, who profited from their manipulated digital selves, but became disenchanted with an online double-life. O'Neill especially profited from her ability to present an idealized self, but gave up the prospect of future profits in her quest for authenticity.

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[40]Day, Elizabeth. "That's Me In The Picture: How Selfies Became A Global Craze."Japan Times, July 13, 2013. Accessed March 5, 2016. http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2013/07/19/world/social-issues-world/thats-me-in-the-picture-how-selfies-became-a-global-craze/#.VtrimqgrLXH.

[41]Qiu, Lin, Jiahui Lu, Shanshan Yang, Weina Qu, and Tingshao Zhu. 2015. "What does your selfie say about you?." Computers In Human Behavior 52, 443-449. PsycINFO, EBSCOhost (accessed January 27, 2016).

[42]Qiu, Lin, Jiahui Lu, Shanshan Yang, Weina Qu, and Tingshao Zhu. 2015. "What does your selfie say about you?."

[43]Kim, Yoonkyung, and Young Min Baek. "When Is Selective Self-Presentation Effective? An Investigation of the Moderation Effects of "Self-Esteem" and "Social Trust"." *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking* 17, no. 11 (2014): 697-701.

[44]Fox, Jesse, and Margaret C. Rooney. 2015. "The Dark Triad and trait self-objectification as predictors of men's use and self-presentation behaviors on social networking sites." Personality And Individual Differences 76, 161-165. PsycINFO, EBSCOhost (accessed March 1, 2016).

Even though these critiques received huge feedback on social media—one of O'Neill's Instagram photos where she re-edited the caption received 2,500 likes and nearly 300 comments—awareness of social media's artificial facade doesn't necessarily translate into disillusionment.

"There is a sense of fulfillment and gratification I get when I post selfies," Shannon Jones, a 21-year-old from Brooklyn, said after taking selfies with the Eiffel Tower as her picturesque backdrop. "I know the likes don't mean anything but it's still nice to get them, you know?" Jones said.

At the Leaning Tower of Pisa in Italy, Natalia Tumanova posed for several selfies while wearing a fashionable pastel pink hat and delicate matching dress. Tumanova, a Ukrainian college student traveling on her own through Italy, acknowledged her tendency to only post the best selfies, but argued, "Life is hard. Why not remember the good times?"[45]

Though these average users acknowledge the fleeting or contrived nature of the images they post, they seem to believe the psychological benefits outweigh adherence to authentic documentation of their lives.

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The selfie helps satisfy our preoccupation with appearance and personal narrative because it allows us ultimate control over how we present ourselves. The unique way we see ourselves and the minute physical changes we obsess over in pictures are part of what makes us human as we strive to establish digital identities that can be remade to mirror or completely contradict our physical identity.

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[45] "Natalia Tumanova." In-person interview by author. March 14, 2016

In addition, the selfie provides instantaneous documentation of often trivial moments that, when seen together, create a narrative of the selfie user's identity and history. Selfies provides a visual language to communicate emotions, achievement, status and other important ideas that might be more difficult to express in words or text. But just as written language is a continually evolving medium, so is our visual language. Selfies appear to at the forefront pushing boundaries of how we communicate with one another in specific communities but also across the anonymous sea of internet users. As with any social phenomenon, there will be positive and negative consequences. But so far most popular media discussion of how selfies are changing us and the way we communicate lacks complexity.

The intergenerational and intercultural reach of social media and selfie culture necessitates understanding how visual communication functions in specific contexts, with special consideration for audience and intent. When selfie culture is seen as its own homogenous language, the visual discrepancies among tourists, celebrities, refugees and slum inhabitants become smaller. But these images must be understood in their own terms. All selfies operate as a means of communication, but what they communicate is context dependent.

Back at Cloud Gate in Chicago, a misty rain falls on the crowd of tourists. A bachelorette party visiting from Tennessee recruits a stranger to take a photo of their group in front of the structure. The group quickly assembles, smiles and takes the picture. The stranger hands the smartphone back to the women who begin dissecting their appearances. The women reach a brief consensus that the photo is good, but this is short-lived.

"Everyone looks good except me," one woman says. The other women are quick to encourage her.

“This rain has my hair looking real whack,” another woman points out while adjusting her hair.

“Should we just take another?” The bride-to-be asks. Without much hesitation, the group assembles itself once again. The bride adjusts her white sash reading “Bride” in a sparkly cursive font. But instead of recruiting another tourist for the photo, the bride reaches out her arm and her group of bridesmaids gathers tightly behind her for a selfie. They decide this rendition is an improvement and briskly walk back beneath the sculpture for protection from the rain and, of course, more selfies.