

Self(ie)-Care and Mental Health

Dissertation for the Degree of MPhil Sociology (The Sociology of Media and Culture)

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Word Count: 20,000



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Abstract

The amount of research on the use of selfies as a form of care is scarce, with those focusing on mental health being non-existent. Following Foucault's genealogy of madness, this paper attempts to analyse how forms of care enacted through the taking, posting, and viewing of selfies work to critique much of the discourse surrounding mental disorders. Starting with the position of selfies as purely a tool to help visualise those previously invisible, care is seen to be enacted in multiple ways as a distraction from life to allow survival. However, the analysis goes further to combine photographic theory, disabilities studies, and photo-voice interviews in an attempt to allow for a voice for the excluded position of the 'mad'. Through a queer reading of narcissism and analysis of the combined embodied gestures in the selfie – commanding the viewer to both “look at me showing you me” and “look at me looking at me” - this paper argues that the image provides the possibility of reconstructing the disabled subject. In short, the aim of the research is to point at how selfies may be engaged to push towards the flourishing life for the marginalised mentally ill body.

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Introduction

With the rise in the prevalence of social media there has been a surge in the number of images posted by those people who have traditionally been constructed as disgusting. These publicly viewable pictures are increasingly democratising the ability to depict the self, allow for care, and create engagement with previously unseen situations. Social media is, therefore, of growing importance for understanding the performance of the disabled subject. This paper focuses specifically on selfies and attempts to analyse how they act as both a reprieve from daily life for those with mental health problems, as well as a more subversive form of care.

Stuart Hall states that “identity is formed at the unstable point where the ‘unspeakable’ stories of subjectivity meet the narratives of history, of a culture” (Hall, in ed. Bhabha and Appignanesi, 1987, p.44). Following Foucault’s genealogy of madness, this paper attempts to analyse how forms of care enacted through the taking, posting, and viewing of selfies work to critique much of the discourse surrounding mental health and possibly provide some voice to the excluded and ‘unspeakable’ position of the ‘mad’.

Sociological research on selfies is a relatively new area of study, only coming to the fore in 2014 with the surge in popularity of the term in common usage during 2013. Academic writing on the topic peaked after International Journal of Communication volume 9, a special issue themed around these self-photographs in 2015. Before 2013 most articles on similar topics refer to selfies as ‘online self-portraits’ i.e Schwarz (2010), clearly noting part of the historical narrative these photos are placed in. Starting with an overview of the general themes that have arisen out of academia, and then moving on to suggest where this paper falls within them, I will note how the study of the self-care of those with mental illnesses has, importantly, been missed out so far.

Because of the nature of the discussion, the literature review is embedded within the introduction and the methodology rather than as a separate chapter. This is as a result of the need to both thoroughly outline the conceptualisation of mental health used, as well as the importance of visual sociological theory to this paper, specifically in the methods section. These tasks required a deep engagement with previous texts, and as such it felt arbitrary and exclusionary to outline and classify certain thought as relevant to a literature review separate to the methods. The literature not brought up in the methodology is placed in the introduction to allow for a detailed overview to the purpose and hopeful goals of the analysis.

As with most social scientific study a broad distinction between quantitative and qualitative research on selfies can be drawn. The quantitative study is largely based around who takes the pictures or whether there is a societal wide addiction to them resulting in negative consequences. The term 'selfitis' refers to a supposed epidemic of people taking selfies, phrased in such terms to portray negativity. Quantitative studies, such as Balakrishnan and Griffiths (2017), Yuchang, Cuicui, Junxiu, and Junyi (2017) and Park and Choi (2017), attempt to analyse whether selfitis is real, and how best to measure selfie over usage. Looking at the papers that frame the images and process of taking them in a more positive light, most are based around some form of content analysis to determine the different usages of selfies by different groups of people, i.e those with depression (Reece and Danforth 2017), or gender variances (Doring, Reif and Poeschl 2016).

Most studies of the selfie are based in some form of qualitative investigation however. Nemer and Freeman state that quantitative study "may obscure the vivid details of personal stories in the process of generalisation and cannot reveal how (especially marginalized) users, as unique individuals, understand, use, and interpret selfies and the specific impacts on their social lives" (2015, p.1834). The main body of work is based around a distinction of those who argue that selfies are narcissistic and bad for society, and those who state the opposite. Most academic

works argue for the latter while popular cultural sources and newspapers focus on the former, though there is a mixture in each category of both. These are empirical studies that take some population and analyse their usage of selfies to show why these pictures are narcissistic or not. Some examples of reports that take selfies as anti-social are Schwarz (2010) who states that online self-portraits, while thought of as increasing agency over representation, are rather just a consumerist means of self-advertisement to make more, but shallower, friendships.

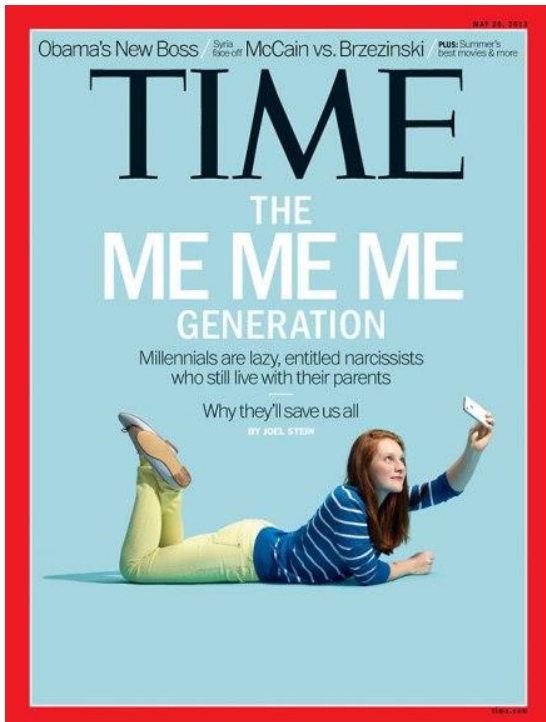


Figure 1. Original Time Magazine Cover



Figure 2. Edited Time Magazine Cover

Newspapers and popular culture that also propose a negative narrative are Chamorro-Premuzic (2014), Hart (2014), or Seidman (2015). Almost all the cultural critics have ‘clickbait’ headlines – titles that are attention grabbing and force a reaction – accusing selfies specifically of narcissism, and also often gendering this (i.e Seidman 2015). Even where newspapers attempt to combat this narrative they still end consistently discussing selfies only in relation to narcissism as well as gendering them. Time Magazine released a copy in May 2013 called ‘The Me, Me, Me Generation: Millennials are Lazy, Entitled Narcissists Who Still Live with Their Parents, Why They’ll Save Us All’ (Figure 1). The front cover features a picture of a young woman lying down and taking a selfie. Even though the editorial inside talks about how selfies

and the millennial generation are not as narcissistic as thought, and are productive, ethical members of society (Stein 2013), the front page, article headline and other visible signifiers clearly reinforce a gendering and relationship towards narcissism. Time Magazine was ridiculed for their approach, with many people editing the front cover. For example, the introduction of the 'troll face' (Figure 2), a popular meme, as well as to alter the text to say: "Please fire us/We truly don't understand how to report a story/Sorry". Another made note of the gendering of the front cover (Figure 3), with the image of the woman slightly faded and extra text stating "Reminder that your body is only ever a prop in someone else's fantasy". Most of these modified versions simply change the 'millennial' subject to another in an attempt to ridicule the message and the constant linking of narcissism and social media usage (Figure 4).

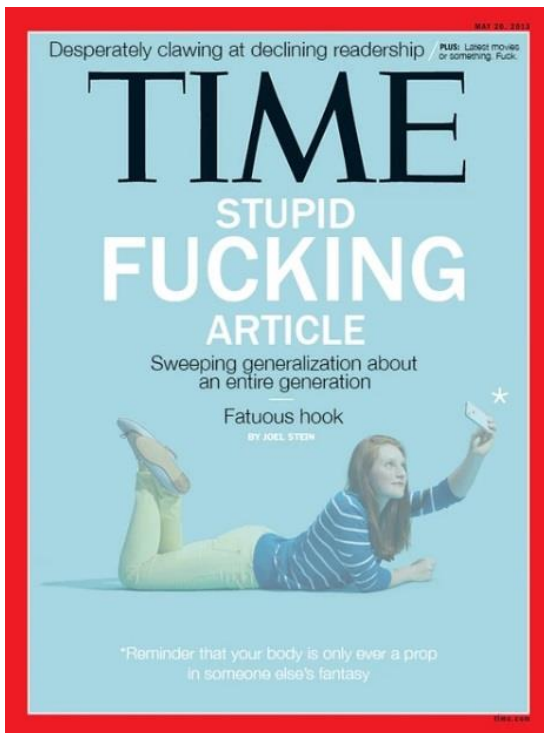


Figure 3. Edited Time Magazine



Figure 4. Edited Time Magazine

Academic articles often try to challenge the discourse of narcissism, through statements such as selfies are “nothing to do with narcissism or attention seeking. [The] selfie practice was embedded in a socioculturally dense context and cannot be reduced to a simple act of self-promotion” (Nemer and Freeman 2015, p.1839). However, the qualitative research, as well as the popular culture reports, rarely attempt to analyse the use of narcissism to discipline

minority groups back into the norm. Instead academics repeatedly just deny selfies are narcissistic. Nor do they often engage with what the selfie is, or how it is discursively constructed through its placement in the historical tradition of photography. There are a few crucial articles that do this however. These attempt to move beyond the simple empirical study of whether a selfie is pro- or anti-social and instead critically engage with the ability of selfies to (re)produce identity.

Butler (in ed. Fraser and Greco 2005) talks about the video of Rodney King being beaten by police as reproduced in a racially saturated field of vision. "According to this racist episteme, he is hit in exchange of the blows he never delivered, but which he is, by virtue of his blackness, always about to deliver" (in ed. Fraser and Greco 2005, pp.141-142). Similarly, there are a few articles that focus on the production of selfies in a gendered context and as such are read and referenced in order to (re)discipline 'attention seeking' women (Burns 2014, 2015). There are none that I have managed to find on the context of an ableist episteme, particularly important due to the creation of mental illness as, specifically, a visual Other, to be observed through bars in exclusion (Foucault 1988). Goldberg (2017) is the only academic who pays attention, not only to how discourse around selfies acts to further oppression, but also to how these images can attempt to subvert the genres in existence.

Others that follow through with analysis of the transgressive element to these self-photographs do so from the tradition of photography history and theory. Frosh explicitly does this through their application of terminology such as 'indexicality' and 'composition' to the selfie. They then look at how the selfie subverts the forms of these concepts as they exist in traditional photography. Indexicality refers to the "sense that photography is distinctive because what it depicts must have been located in front of the camera at the moment this photo was taken", and composition to "the arrangement of elements within the space of a picture and their orientation to the position of the viewer" (2015, pp.1609-1611). Selfies act to

emphasise the constructed and composed nature of the photograph. Instead of just working as a record of an event taking place, to prioritise the present and say: “look at this as it is here now”, they attack the documentary and scientific gaze in traditional portraiture (Lalvani 1996).

Analysis through the representational content is important as, according to Mirzoeff, “the postmodern is a visual culture” (cited in Rose 2013) with important questions to ask when looking at selfies going beyond the technocultural context of social media platforms to “how we see, how we are able to see, allowed, or made to see, and how we see this seeing and the unseeing therein” (Foster, cited in Rose 2013).

Where mental health and self-care are analysed, outside the context of selfies, it is usually through the lens of positive psychology. ‘Self-Care’ in the health profession often refers to the ability of those with mental disorders to look after themselves without the need for therapist intervention¹, rather than any political and structural notion. The conceptualisation of self-care in this paper builds on the queer theory of Lauren Berlant, using a crucial distinction she makes between self-maintenance (“cruising along” to survive) and self-knowledge (“exploring what might be possible”) (Duschinsky 2015, p.180). The theorisation is based around the notion of the ‘genre’. In ‘The Female Complaint’ (2008) Berlant defines these as the aesthetic frameworks that order our affects. Through them the world becomes sensible and communicable. They construct what it means to have a life, to feel, to succeed or fail at being oneself. Genres do not just organise and offer certain promises about life, they also come to be life itself. The example often cited by Berlant is that of a relationship. In them the meaning of what it is to have a good life is ordered, and even further, the relationship comes to represent life itself, with those inside it not imagining a possible world outside. Another example is put well by a quote from Žižek in the film ‘Žižek!’: “It’s much easier to imagine the end of all

¹ See: Georgiadis and McPherson (2016) amongst others.

life on earth than a ... radical change in capitalism” (Taylor 2005). Here, the object of desire represents more than just the object as it comes to be life itself.

In the ordering of conventions of life, these affective attachments become “placeholders for intensities within streaming experience.” Duschinsky states that “their conventions give a place and pacing to – and thereby partially hollow out – the discrepancies and the possibilities which occur within the construction of a particular form of feeling subject” (2015, p.179). This ‘hollowing out’ of our affects and desires is one measure by which we are restricted from realizing the good life, and it impacts some more than others. Berlant notes how queer life is more exhausting as there are so few conventions, and where there are they often restrict the subject from, or hollow out, any notions of love, feeling, success, and so on (Duschinsky 2015). Here we can see that genres are how we organise our experiences to allow us to get through the day. They must also, however, be engaged with as ways for us to invent new attachments that work better for us.

Unlike Foucault, Berlant places a large amount of emphasis on the study of how these genres make our lives bearable, rather than just on how to transgress current attachments. Seeing life as a struggle she places great importance on those acts that allow us to take a break and make us be able view the world as inhabitable. While survival is crucial to her, she does not characterise it as a success. Survival is not flourishing. While the world may be better suited to some people’s ability to flourish than others, everyone has to take time to maintain themselves, even if that is just spending an evening doing nothing except watching a lot of television. Going even further, Berlant states:

“Demanding encounters ... force us to confront how little we want to disturb ourselves within the scenes of attunement we also must of necessity seek. One flails around wanting something other than what is, but one also fears the disappointment of one’s

lack of imagination and trust in the patience and inventiveness of others” (Berlant and Edelman 2013, p.110).

Not only do we need to maintain ourselves to survive, but we also fear life without an object. It is hard to inhabit the world, but it may often be harder to change it.

However, through the study of these genres Berlant comes to explore the boundaries of conventions, allowing for the creation of new ones, or an increase in space within a current attachment. One example is that of ‘flat affect’ in ‘Structures of Unfeeling: Mysterious Skin’ (Berlant 2015). Here she examines the performativity of affect in relation to the fact that a strong emotion is meant to represent the idea that something important has happened and reveal a truth about some internal state. In the film and novel ‘Mysterious Skin’ emotion is underperformed. Drawing from this Berlant comes to a new genre of affective response where the emphasis is placed on suspension and an allowance to “withdraw into whatever “whatever” style works” (2015, p.211) rather than the drawing into a specific and closed convention that hollows out emotion into a hyper-expressive form.

The challenge for Berlant, as with Foucault, is that subjects are non-sovereign, they will always remain in a power system that constructs them. Hardt tries to clarify this by claiming that Berlant’s political project therefore matches up with that of Spinoza, and that both, instead of attempting to reduce relationality to others, try to “seek a greater proportion of active rather than passive affections” (2015, p.222). Hardt is stating that we need to increase the ratio of affective attachments that allow us to strive to those that cut off chances at flourishing. This paper understands self-care through these notions, of survival and attempting to push for striving, when analysing the use of selfies by those with mental health problems.

Most analysis using this understanding of self-care on social media focuses on the communities that have formed on different platforms rather than on selfies themselves, such as Jurgenson's (2012) research on Pinterest as a safe space for women. The articles that do explicitly engage with selfies as a form of self-care don't cover the experiences of those who identify as having mental illnesses. In addition, most of the discourse of self-care and selfies is through a prioritisation of white 'visibility' – "time passed and the selfie's more general life – and difference affirming politic – which had previously allowed for a wide variety of non-normative identities to circulate and receive validation on user-driven platforms like Tumblr and Instagram – whittled itself down to its most palatable iteration" (Dean 2016).



Figure 5. Quote from Popular TV Show 'RuPaul's Drag Race'

This paper, and its focus on mental illnesses, fits into the current research by building on qualitative research that goes beyond analysis of whether selfies are narcissistic, and towards how their usage can be used to discipline or subvert. The focus on mental health is important as it hasn't yet been covered in the academic field. However, further to this, it is crucial due to the links between the visual nature of selfies and modern society, and the socio-historic construction of madness to be viewed but not to speak. Having covered the conceptualisation of self-care that I use, I turn now to the methods used in this research.

Methodology

Selfies are a visual medium and should be analysed as such, alongside the stories, process of production and distribution, and affect created by and through the image for those who took them. The regularity of posting selfies, the platforms used, the content, the meanings in the images are all crucial. Due to this both the aesthetic factors and the non-representational context they exist within need to be analysed. Frosh follows this up, stating that talk of selfies distinctiveness from earlier forms of self-depiction focuses mainly on the technosocial context than aesthetic developments. However, while true that “understanding that a particular image is a selfie requires viewers to make inferences about the non-depictive technocultural conditions in which the image was made” it is also true that “one cannot recognise an image as a selfie without looking at what it represents” (Frosh 2015, p.1608). This led me to use photo-voice as an interview method. I use this analysis of the image and already existing work in the fields of queer and photography theory, and disabilities studies to examine the relationship between mental health, care, selfies, and society.

Methods that prioritise the visual assign importance to what can be seen, over the classically textual and contextual analysis of sociology. Bourdieu, along with multiple other theorists, seemingly reject the content of a work, to construct a sociology of art that focuses on the situation it exists within for an understanding of it. Here the field of its production and display are important, however there is an indifference to the visual itself (Bourdieu, 1993). However, there are multiple reasons to consider this as important to engage with. Uimonen states, in his article analysing the importance of Facebook profile pictures for students in an arts college in Tanzania, that “by visually expressing themselves through profile photographs, users engage in the social construction of reality” (2013, p.122). Berger agrees, noting that the dominant male gaze objectifies the female nude in oil paintings. He carries his analysis over to modern advertising and imaging showing how the same issues occur there too (1972, episode 2). In

both of these instances, analysis of the images' content reveals something about the participants, specifically about the actions by and production of the individuals (racialised, gendered) body.

The visual reveals identities that would remain invisible through other means. Further to Uimonen and Berger, Jackson states: "visual methodologies may offer a more comprehensive picture of a particular social phenomenon by attending to the feelings and experiences of the participants, which may not be accessible in verbal exchanges alone" (2012, pp.426-427). The information in the work, rather than just the surrounding context, is therefore vital to comprehend in order to gain an understanding of meaning otherwise unavailable. If the data is irreducible to the textual or oral, then this is particularly important when analysing self-photography.

Beyond just an analysis of meaning and increasing the available data, the visual is important for its aesthetic qualities. Clark and Morriss state that "we may engage with the visual, and with the techniques that produce it, because we want to not only see, but also, perhaps, show others, what the world looks like" (2017, p.39). They argue that we must consider the relevance of an aesthetic, as opposed to a social scientific, analysis of works to fully engage with them. This is especially important due to the significant amount of theoretical analysis placing the basis of the construction of subjects in a form of aesthetics².

An example of the discussion of aesthetics in relation to mental health is Ross's book on depression as a quality to be found in the formal structure of a work rather than solely in the body of the artist. Her analysis shows how "contemporary art ... does not so much represent as enact depression in the triple sense of the verb: it simultaneously performs and contributes to the depressive paradigm, but it also acts out depression discursively, structurally, formally, and

² See: Foucault and his "aesthetics of existence", in particular in 'The Use of Pleasure' (1990, p.89). This is also seen in Rancière's (2011) idea of the "distribution of the sensible" resting on an aesthetic base.

symptomatically” (2006, p.xviii). Research following in this line makes clear the need to analyse the representational content of any work to understand both the selfie as an embodied gesture, as well as a space for the construction and contestation of the disabled subject.

Throughout this discussion, the relevance of the content of the self-photographs does not mean that no engagement with the context occurs. Context here doesn’t just mean the immediate surroundings of the images, the caption, comments, similar selfies, and memes, though these resulting significations are relevant and interlink with the representational content of the picture. For example, Reece and Danforth examined a number of Instagram accounts and found that posts with more comments were more likely to have been posted by someone with depression, where those with more likes followed the opposite trend (2017, p.7). While I do not focus on quantitative study here, the findings of their article show that there may be some use in contextualising the images in the meanings provided by the caption, likes, and platform.

Beyond these immediate surroundings, the intent that went into the production of a work and the audience’s interpretation both also require an analysis of meaning in relation to specific actors. Hall, quoted in Sturken and Cartwright, states that “it is by our use of things, and what we say, think, and feel, about them – how we represent them – that we give them a meaning” (2000, p.4). Rose (2013) also points this out in her discussion of Barthes’ semiotics, noting that there needs to be a further consideration of the idea of a ‘social semiotics’ that analyses signs in relation to their context. Therefore, when analysing both the act of care and the selfie it was crucial to place them in the socio-historic discourse that produces them and allows for their use in certain ways.

The method of photo-voice allows for a combination of the discussion of the content and context. Here the participants take photographs that highlight specific themes, and these are engaged with in discussions with the researcher. This combines an analysis of the content in

the image with the meaning for the creator of the work. By interviewing people you do not lose “the vivid details of personal stories in the process of generalisation and [instead] reveal how users, as unique individuals, understand, use, and interpret selfies and the specific impacts on their social lives” (Nemer and Freeman, 2015, p.1834).

The decision to focus in on selfies, as opposed to the entirety of the content taken and posted on social media in an act of self-care, is partially to narrow the analysis down to allow for an attention to the specific functioning of self-photography. These pictures provide control over any framing of the self that is not possible in images taken by other people. Joanou (2017), in their article on the photo-voice project they participated in with street children in Lima, Peru, talks constantly about the importance of the process of the research and images involved in humanizing the participants by giving them control over their own image, as well as showing their perspective both to the researcher and to society more generally. The control over presentation of the self is particularly important for marginalised subjects, such as those with mental health illnesses, who otherwise are represented in specific ways by socio-historic constraints external to themselves. Self-photography, and the ability to choose where, how, and whether to post the picture online provides some semblance of power over their own identity.

Not only are selfies constructed through and in operation in a distinct discursive framework to other types of photography, based in operations such as a gendering of them (Burns 2014, 2015, Hills 2013), their technocultural context (Frosh 2015), and placement in photographic traditions (Brager 2014, Saltz 2014, Gómez Cruz and Thornham 2015), they also have substantially different representational content. Photo-voice allows for some engagement with the aesthetic elements of the selfies through discussions about the choices involved in selecting the framing, composing, and so on, as well as the affective content and response to the image. However, to study the aesthetic content of the pictures it has been necessary to go

beyond photo-voice and incorporate concepts and analysis from photography theory, though this has only been carried out in relation to and to further the topics revealed through the interviews.

Alongside this analysis of personal photographs comes an ethical concern about the publishing of the pictures discussed. Moreno Figueroa warns against situating photographs in an article seemingly purely to satiate the “fascination” of the reader. She details the importance of “looking emotionally” in order to engage with the whole experience of a situation (2008). While the images are of importance to the researcher it is less clear that any reader of an article needs to observe them, especially where there are concerns over their response to doing so. Barthes makes a distinction between the “studium” and the “punctum” (1981). Studium refers to the general meaning in and interpretation of the viewed image revealing history, politics, information about the art historical tradition it exists in, etc. From this we can see that placing the selfie in the context of academic writing might change the meaning and interpretation of the image, and while that is certainly an issue, it is the punctum that Moreno Figueroa is more worried about. The punctum is the content of the image which we emotionally and very personally respond to beyond the meaning or beauty of the work. Here Barthes talks about the Winter Garden image, a picture of his mother who had recently passed away.

“I cannot reproduce the Winter Garden Photograph. It exists only for me. For you, it would be nothing but an indifferent picture, one of the thousand manifestations of the ‘ordinary’; it cannot in any way constitute the visible object of a science; it cannot establish an objectivity, in the positive sense of the term; at most it would interest your studium: period, clothes, photogeny; but in it, for you, no wound” (Barthes, cited in Moreno Figueroa 2008, p.69)

For Barthes the picture holds intense emotional value, but the worth is subjective and held only by him as the son of the deceased mother in the photograph. Following this he refuses to reproduce the image in his book even though it is crucial to the research that has been undertaken. When discussing and using selfies it is crucial to consider this element in the interview process by attempting to create an emotional intimacy between the participant and the researcher to interact with “how it feels and what it is like” (Moreno Figueroa, 2008) rather than just a neutral analysis of what is seen in front of you. Moreover, when publishing these images, it is necessary to consider the emotional intimacy with the participant and whether showing the pictures discussed breaks from this connection and replicates the content of the image while losing the *punctum* for the article’s audience.

For this research on selfies, mental health, and self-care there has been significant engagement with photos with content of intense emotional value, some of the most forceful of these being of people who are recovering from eating disorders and have personal connections to images of them where they feel they look particularly attractive or not. While in the discussion about the image it was possible to “look emotionally” and consider the affective response and content of the photograph, this will not be the case for those seeing most of them reproduced in an academic text. Due to this I have carefully considered the selection of images to place in this text and only reproduced ones where these ethical concerns as to the loss of *punctum* are less of an issue, such as that of the ‘trash selfie’ (Figure 6). Where there has been the need to detail elements of a certain picture or photo format, such as the ‘mirror selfie’ (Figure 7), and there has not been an example possible to show without the reduction of the emotional content being an issue, I have included a similar image of myself. Hopefully, my own selfies also act to, literally, place myself in the paper and highlight the constructed and subjective nature of the study and the role I have played as the researcher.

To get participants for my photo-voice interviews I created a private Google document asking for people's names, preferred contact details, and what platforms they take selfies on. I shared this on multiple social media platforms (Facebook, Tumblr, Twitter, and Instagram) asking for anyone who identifies as having mental health issues and who takes selfies to respond. I kept responses confidential and deleted the Google document after contacting the eight people who I selected to be participants.

I chose eight people for several reasons. The detail of the discussions had with each person, lasting around 45 minutes each, including discussions of three or four images as well as more general questions, meant that significant quantities of data was produced. Moreover, I felt that within this group I had a significant gender diversity, having two men, two non-binary people, and four women, with the increased representation of women justified by the gendering of care and selfies as female, and use of this gendering as a form of discipline. Due to posting from my personal social media accounts all eight people either attended the Universities of Oxford or Cambridge where most of my connections have been made. Also, my attempts at having an ethnically and racially diverse group were not as successful as I would have liked, with one British Punjabi woman, one white South African woman, five white British people, and one white US man. I also chose participants based on a range of social media platform usage, including one person limited to taking selfies but never posting them.

When anonymising names there was a decision between using a fake name or using no name and instead 'participant', 'interviewee', etc. While using the word 'participant' may act to distance the reader and disembodify the interviewee, I opted for no name regardless of this negative. Naming creates meaning, this can be positive in the instance of fake names making clearer the personhood of the individual being mentioned, however can also pose an issue. Just as Moreno Figueroa (2008) chose not to include pictures in the text as a political statement over the lack of trust in the audience of their article, the same argument can be

made for names. The racist episteme the reader looks at this paper in results in names conveying negative or positive signification in different ways based in the way they sound. Stating 'participant' is one manner in trying to overcome this. Secondly, also following from Moreno Figueroa's article, names hold punctum for their 'owners' in many cases. They are emotionally filled, holding content outside their studium, particularly in the case of trans and gender queer people who have selected their own names as part of transitioning (Gibson 2016). Referring to an interviewee through a fake name would be to show an emotional indifference to them, particularly to the importance of the personal value of the chosen name of one of the nonbinary participants.

When asking for participants I asked for responders who self-identified as having a mental health illness. There are several issues to discuss including, amongst others, what I mean by the term mental illness and why it is justifiable to use this concept, the distinction between physical and mental health, and why self-diagnosis rather than clinical is my criterion. When talking about mental illness it is important to note there are multiple different conceptions of what this means, however the prevalent clinical accounts come from positivist medicine and are laid out in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM). The DSM lays out all the disorders currently identified as mental illnesses and then talks about the symptoms and theorised biological causes of them.

There are many internal debates as to the best wording of the DSM. The proposed criterion for identification of a mental disorder in the fifth version (DSM-5) have been critiqued and lead to some ambiguousness. One discussion hinges on the wording of criterion E: "that is not solely a result of social deviance or conflicts with society" (American Psychiatric Association 2013, p.20). This exists as a "safeguard against pathologizing social deviance" (Abouelleil and Bingham 2014, p.244) which is particularly important given the political misuse of mental

disorders to exclude other groups, such as the LGBTQ community with homosexuality being listed in the third edition of the DSM and not fully being taken out until 1987 (Burton 2015).

On top of overt political intent to separate out a group, poor clinical standards and conceptual issues, like not recognising that psychiatric diagnoses are value laden, also lead to abuse occurring. Whilst there are attempts to overcome these, they still occur today with one current case pointed out by Netherland and Hansen being that of the reinforcement of racial hierarchies in the opioid crisis in the USA. Here, 'White drugs', those like OxyContin and Suboxone that were prescribed mainly to suburban White US residents, are decriminalised and medicalised, with the epidemic often being diagnosed through psychiatric disorders. At the same time the "more punitive systems that govern the drug use of people of colour" (2017, p.217) are left intact.

Foucault attacks the clinical definitions, noting that "the very notion of "mental illness" is the expression of an attempt doomed from the outset" (1987, p.76). Instead of looking to see what wording of the DSM criterion mental disorders should be diagnosed through, we need to examine our understanding of mental health through the historic and socio-cultural conception of 'madness'.

"The recognition that allows one to say, "This man is mad," is neither a simple nor an immediate act. It is based, in fact, in a number of earlier operations and above all the dividing up of social space according to the lines of valuation and exclusion" (Foucault 1987, p.78)

In 'Mental Health and Psychology', later updated and extended in 'Madness and Civilisation', Foucault attempts to construct a genealogy of madness in order to examine the way past events have constructed our modern understanding of madness, psychiatry and mental health. One of the crucial developments, starting in the mid-18th century was that of the exclusion of madness, along with criminals, the poor, the disabled, and others, and placement of them

separate to society in internment asylums. In the classical era, and in the early days of bourgeois morality, this exclusion of madness was not based in any understanding of illness, at least not in the sense that we talk of mental illness, but rather through societies examining of itself and the resulting exclusion of unproductivity and 'Unreason'.

Across the course of the 18th and 19th Centuries these other forms of life were taken back out of the asylum and only the 'mad' were left in. Through this silencing and separation madness lost its language and began to be spoken of (using the speech of 'Reason') only as an Other, rather than through or by itself. "The language of psychiatry, which is a monologue of reason about madness, has been established only on the basis of such a silence" (Foucault 1988, p.x-xi). Psychiatry, under this conceptualisation of mental illness, is a form of reason attempting to speak about madness while excluding it and keeping it silent. With the gradual medicalization of the mental at the same time as the exclusion of madness there was a shift towards what we currently see as mental illness. In the process stigma, personal blame, and moral guilt, which continue to exist in some form today, were directed towards disorders by early medical practitioners. Beyond medical understandings of disorders playing a role in the creation of shame, today clinical practice is not "interested in the root causes of suffering and unhappiness". Instead "[positive psychologists] want us to focus on producing positive, optimistic affects by transforming our relationship to the often miserable and brutal social worlds we inhabit" (Wilson 2018, pp.175-176). Instead of examining mental health through the criterion of positive medicine one should attempt to engage with the political and structural causes of illness.

Where Foucault often takes the mentally ill body as a passive object purely accepting meaning, it is important to note the contestation and creation of signification in this site as well. As such one should study both the socio-cultural construction of madness, but also look at the 'mad'

body as one that performs and acts to reproduce or subvert. Through this study of care and selfies I take mental illness as this idea of mental health beyond the clinical definitions.

Berlant, unlike Foucault, takes note of the acts that people enact in everyday life in order to continue existing (2011). Foucault makes statements such as “‘Psychology’ is merely a thin skin on the surface of the ethical world in which modern man seeks his truth – and loses it” (1987, p.74). These claims, while unintentional, push people away from seeking care or doing things that would allow for their continued existence in the harsh world. Even if these acts of care reinforce and reproduce the subject in a marginalized position they are still important for those who use them to be able to just get through the day. Care, here, can include going to Cognitive Behavioural Therapy or taking anti-depressant SSRIs, these construct the subject and their biological make-up at ‘fault’ and de-politicise the reasons for increasing rates of depression and anxiety (Dardot and Laval 2013). Regardless, they are crucial for the survival of many people with mental health problems, and to deny this would be to claim only an ‘abstract’ liberation where those with illnesses are forced to suffer. “In this scene, activity toward reproducing life is neither identical to making it or oneself better ... such activity is directed toward making a less bad experience. It’s a relief, a reprieve, not a repair” (Berlant 2011, p.117). Foucault’s tone places him in a position of superiority to ‘psychology’ and to those that use it for survival. While he does raise an important critical view, it is also important to not degrade the position of those that are already excluded further and allow them to continue caring for themselves, even if these do also reinforce their precarity.

In this research I examine the medicalized conception of mental health and explore whether selfies and self-care offer any critique of this. As a result, my focus is on mental, rather than physical or chronic illness. It is important to realise the interconnection of the multiple forms of disability, for example the significant study surrounding the relationship between

gastrointestinal disorders and eating disorders³. Therefore, while I split mental illnesses from others, I keep in mind the medical links as well as the intersectional nature of marginalisation.

‘Mental health’ is itself a big category. When asking for participants I didn’t specify the mental illnesses I would accept or reject for the people wanting to be interviewees. This was, in part not to limit myself to certain clinical criterion, but also because there are commonalities across the construction of mental illnesses. In the clinical world mental illnesses are largely determined by their symptoms rather than any neurological state, with the DSM-5 criterion stating mental disorders are determined through “syndromes” or “patterns” that “reflect an underlying psychobiological dysfunction” (American Psychiatric Association 2013, p.20). Ross, therefore, notes that while the DSM does try to differentiate ailments, due to there being broad similarities across many symptoms, as well as common misdiagnoses, ‘depression’ becomes an ever-broadening category encompassing almost all the others (2006, p.xvii). This block categorising of mental health into depression is common across society where illnesses are, en mass, constructed as Other, rather than individualised. This otherness in everyday life can be seen through the current pattern of newspapers questioning the ability of Donald Trump to run the country, not due to poor policies or management of bureaucracy, but instead of the basis of health⁴. While there are variations between different mental illnesses, this study doesn’t attempt to block them together, instead it takes a broad sample in order to critique the entire construction and oppression of mental illness. Where there have been variations noted they have allowed a revealing of forms of care and usage of selfies that would have been limited had I focused only on a one.

Also, partially out of concern for restricting myself to a clinical view of mental health, I asked for people who self-identified as having mental health issues, instead of just those with an

³ See: Perkins, Keville, Schmidt, and Chadler (2005) or Abraham and Kellow (2011) amongst others.

⁴ See: Hamblin (2018), Lee (2018), or Batchelor (2017) amongst others.

official's diagnoses. On top of this fear of limiting my conception of mental illness there are structural issues that block certain groups more than others from visiting health care professional, and therefore I didn't want to exclude these people or the importance of their selfies and self-care. Mind UK (2017) and the National Alliance on Mental Illness (2018) in America have released statistics on the estimated number of undiagnosed people in their respective countries of work. Some of the reasons for this are: a fear of family or cultural response, underfunding and lack of training for health professionals (Ratnarajan 2016, Anonymous 2016), or the gendering of certain illnesses such as ADHD meaning young women have less of a chance of being diagnosed (Crawford 2003). By accepting people who self-identify as having mental health problems then this research attempts to avoid those structural issues to the largest extent possible.

During the process of the interview the photo-voice method practically entailed spending about 15 minutes discussing general themes about selfies, social media, mental health, and care, and then moving on to around 30 minutes looking at 3 or 4 images selected by the participant. During the first 15 minutes I started by asking "Do you take many selfies?" and then the conversation built on from their answer. The themes in the first section were then carried over into the second part of the interview looking specifically at the pictures.

Before meeting the interviewees, I asked them to select a few selfies that they had taken that covered a range of different selfie types, platforms posted on and reasons to have taken them. This vague and broad criterion for selection of the images to discuss was central to allowing the participant full control over identifying what was important. I didn't want to specify certain platforms, that the selfies had to have been shared, that they had to enact a specific form of care, and so on due to worries over my own personal experiences with social media biasing the discussion through setting the agenda as to what could be included.

I outlined to the participant that they could leave at any time, everything would be anonymised, both on the transcript and in the final paper, and that they could ask me not to publish any images they didn't want me to. I gave them my contact details so that they could contact me later if they changed their mind about anything to do with the ethics and consent of the research. Half way through, at about the 25-minute mark, I stopped the recording to make sure the microphone was picking up the voices. I then used this pause for a break to allow the participant to think over what they stated and if they wanted to continue.

Drawing from queer and feminist theory, there are several other issues that I attempt to tackle within the research process. Thompson, quoted in Reinhartz, states: 'I could see the woman's face and hear her exclamations and pain' (1992, p.35). Following from this, and other similar statements, I have transcribed the interviews, however have done so whilst noting that the change in medium results in a loss or different affective impact. The transcribed discussion can distance the reader from the emotion and pain that is audible in the recording or visible in the image. This removes an audience from a source of meaning, however, more importantly, it also distances the researcher from practicing any reflexivity. Instead attempts should be made to embed themselves in the situation and attempting to take feelings seriously.

Rooke states that "while queer theory has decentred and fragmented the research 'subject's' subjectivities, the self that is producing much cultural research remains somewhat distant and stable". Instead she believes "an intellectual commitment to queer theory and queer methodology requires and epistemological openness and attention to one's own ... subjectivity and the performativity of the self in the research process" (2009). Rooke is noting that in much classical theory, even where queer methods have begun to gain credibility, there is still a separation of the 'cartographer' from the subject under discussion. Instead of this we are tasked with opening ourselves to the field and letting it reconstruct us, just as we also construct the field as the researcher. I have attempted to practice this in a few ways. Whilst I

did transcribe what was said, I used both the written and audio information I had to come to my conclusions, listening and reading over both multiple times.

To attempt further reflexivity the discussion in the interview was as unstructured as possible. Instead of specific questions to answer and then move onto the next one there were only general themes to consider. These general themes were introduced in an opening question or moved onto naturally in the discussion of the images and then I, as the researcher, asked follow-up questions based in the participants answers. This allowed both me and the participant to have joint control over the direction of the discussion as I was not forcing specific questions upon people, but rather focusing on thoughts that originated with the interviewee. Furthermore, I clearly participated as someone who also identifies as having a mental illness. Instead of distancing myself as a neutral observer I placed myself into the conversation as someone who suffers and performs themselves in many of the same ways.

The enactment of reflexivity was not perfect however. There are systems of knowledge production even internal to the identity as mentally ill. As such I tried to not construct the analysis around my version of illness and engage with other selfhoods that may be opposed to my own. There was inevitably still some accidental re-centring of myself however. This was most clear in the topics that I chose to pick out of the discussions and focus in on during the interviews. While I did try to minimise this as much as possible through speaking far less than the participants and only asking vague questions, there is still the need to note that the research outcomes were produced through an interaction between my subjectivity and the participants.

The rest of this paper is split up into four main sections. The first, 'Self-Care, Control, and Visibility', covers how selfies work as a break from everyday life. It also covers how these images may change people's perceptions through increasing control over depiction and visibility for the disabled subject. The second, 'The Hidden Visible', looks at how these acts of

self-care cannot work purely through providing visibility to a 'hidden' body. There is further analysis of how the images are viewed in an ableist episteme and the resulting need to create an association *with* the mentally ill subject or attack the dominant ideology. Section three, 'Look at Me Looking at Me', follows the account of the images as just visualising the body by attempting to show how the selfie is an embodied gesture stating: "look at me looking at me". This section engages with how selfies can transgress the critique of narcissism placed at them, as well as with the work of Coleman and Moreno Figueroa (2010) the role of hope in seeing the self as beautiful. The final area of analysis, 'Mental Health, Self-Care, and Capitalism', focuses on how both care and mental health have been constructed, in part, through capitalistic and neoliberal discourse. Here I look at how some uses of social media end up reproducing the subject as individualised, but also how the taking of time to focus on the 'undeserving' self is an act of "warfare" (Lorde, cited in Ahmed 2014).

Self-Care, Control, and Visibility

"So I think that's what self-care is like. It's being softer with yourself, but then I think in many instances it's like preservation, and that preservation can also be like provocative in some sense right. Like self-care is also loving your body and there's different ways to do that right and some of those ways can be provocative."

This quote from one of the participants makes clear that self-care is both about being able to continue to survive through the day, as 'preservation', as well as this more 'provocative' type which acts to subvert genres and attempt at a flourishing life. Throughout the interviews many references are made to the use of selfies as a break from everyday life. Berlant notes that, though this act of care may reproduce life in its current oppressive conventions, it acts as a relief from the struggle of the intensities of survival. This conceptualisation of self-care is the 'common sense' understanding of it in society and is common across popular culture. Many

songs, for example Solange's '(Borderline) An Ode to Self-Care, poetry, tweets and much more details this. In an interview with 'W' magazine there is an interchange between Solange and the questioner that goes:

"Q: You have a song in the album called "(Borderline) An Ode to Self Care." What does self-care look like to you?

A: You know, I probably wrote that because I need to manifest it more in my life. Even in the midst of this last week with the multiple murders of young black men that occurred, I chose this time not to watch. Just for the sake of being able to exist in that day, to exist without rage, and to exist without heartbreak." (Gevinson 2016)

Here it is clear that self-care for Solange looks like Berlant's 'reprieve'. The idea of sometimes choosing not to watch to continue with existence is key in the answer given. The bombarding of the message that black people are a disposable part of U.S life wears away at the ability to remain seeing the world as inhabitable. Therefore, instead of continuing to participate or attempting to oppose the norm in this situation Solange chose 'this time not to watch'.

This is seen also through the interviews in multiple different ways. Most of the participants spoke either of taking and posting of images as allowing them to feel "a little bit more in control of everything that was going on" or "as a reminder that [they] can do it". These photographs are not necessarily for others, even if they are posted. Instead those taking and posting them can stop and take a photo, and then move back on with life. When having a bad day with mental health, this halt of the everyday allows a brief moment of separation where it is possible to note that you have friends who are there to like your shared photos, that you look good, or otherwise. The normal is then moved back to, but now with a renewed sense of being able to carry on, even if there have been no changes to the situation and the mental illness is still negatively affecting life.

These moments of separation are not necessarily about manufacturing happiness however. One of the participants mentioned how hard it is to produce and sharing her selfies: “but just thinking now like with all this thought that goes into selfies and then to posting, its so like fraught and yet like, we do it, or people do it, and I do it, as an act of self-care, yet like it’s such an emotionally draining process”. Care enacted through selfies is mentioned in tandem with the process of writing in a personal diary or journal. The process of writing a private journal entry requires a focus on the self and, specifically, on the moment being recorded. It takes significant effort to do satisfactorily, may be stressful, and makes the author consider how they are feeling. Even if shared, it is not the others response that matters but the process of writing. This is true also of the creation of the selfie. Instead of creating happiness and moving beyond the hardships of the mental illness, selfies are a moment allowing distraction and processing of feelings – the finding of a space within, rather than outside, the disorder.



Figure 6: 'Trash Selfie' 20/02/18

In a discussion between Berger and Sontag, Berger states “what the story narrates and tells is sheltered within the story from oblivion, forgetfulness, and daily indifference” (Berger and

Sontag 1983, 2:37). Here, another important feature of the writing of a journal, and the taking of selfies, is brought forward. Not only is the process of creation a break due to the distraction from the everyday and the need to process feelings, but also there is the concretisation of the self, moment, or memory in the outcome. This is seen particularly in the fact that often selfies are taken, not shared, and not looked back on, but instead just stored on the phone (see Figure 9). This mirrors the fact that journals and diaries are rarely re-read after being written. This doesn't mean that the outcome doesn't matter and only the process of production is important. Instead it is the knowledge that what the disabled subject considers important is solidified against "daily indifference" and can be looked back on *if wanted to* but is rarely actually done so.

Joanou (2017) states something similar with the self-portraits in their photo-voice project providing a humanizing element for the street kids, allowing them to document their existence and concretise memories they consider important. This is crucial for the self-care of those with mental health issues as it provides some solidity in life against circumstance that seem uncontrollable and puts importance to an oft ignored voice. One particularly severe case of destabilisation and the discounting the voice is a common occurrence called "diagnostic overshadowing" where medical practitioners don't trust those with mental illnesses and refuse to prescribe medicines, belief descriptions of symptoms, or state physiological conditions are just a result of psychological ones – in other words, "get over it, it's all in your head" (Garey 2013). After such a lack of faith in the disabled subject, this concretising of memories and moments in the photographic evidence of selfies, even if very subjective, is vital.

This feeling of increased control over life is produced through the control over depiction that the selfie returns to the taker. Tiidenberg notes that self-photography allows a "reclaiming [of] control over one's embodied self AND over the body-aesthetic" (2014, p.1, capitals theirs). Whereas in traditional portraiture another takes the image, in turn choosing the composition

and, ultimately, the aesthetic of the body, the selfie reverts this with the photographer being the photographed. This was mentioned many times throughout the interviews, with one participant going as far as to say, at the end that “you can summarise all that we’ve talked about as this, yeah it all comes back to control”. This same person stated:

“With selfies you can very much control how you appear to the outside world. Whereas with other people taking pictures, because, well obviously with my eating disorder if people had a camera out I literally, I would be like absolutely not, like angry, that was my reaction like actual anger. Um but then I could very much control like the image and so it helped me.”

Not only does self-depiction reclaim the aesthetic of the body and allow for the enactment of self-care as a break, it is necessary for some to feel comfortable with images of themselves at all. Whether the taker thinks the pictures make them look good or bad, there was at least the knowledge that it was them taking themselves as they wanted to be so, and it was entirely within their power to choose what to do with the image after. It could just be immediately deleted, as is done in many cases. This control over depiction works to enable self-care as self-maintenance, but also manages to work to subvert.

Žižek, in ‘Less Than Nothing’, talks about the Higgs boson particle, mentioning it is “called the “God particle” [because] it is a “something” of which the “nothing” itself is made, literally the “stuff of nothing”” (cited in Rodrigues 2012). The point he is attempting to make is that situations that seem like a “nothing” are sustained by “something”. To be accepted in society those with mental illnesses often have to put effort in to hiding a part of themselves. One of the people in the interviews for this research noted that their ADHD led to them being seen to be “chatting shit at people all the time” and that this was harmful to their life. There is an aspiration to normalcy here, a “desire to feel normal and to feel normalcy as a ground of dependable life” (Berlant 2007, p.281). In order to be normal, in this case to blend in and be a “nothing”, a significant effort needs to go in to produce that state. However, this same person

stated that they did need somewhere to “just blughhh but in a social manner”. As such their Snapchat acted as a place where they “chronically overshared”. Sharing selfies, with captions and visual edits, then acted as a form of self-care due to it being a space where it was acceptable to not put in this extra effort to be normal.

The idea that social media, and in specific the sharing of selfies, allows openness to the ‘real’ self is copied throughout many of the interviews where others mention that they are able to share their “honest thoughts”, “honest photos”, and “truthful, honest captions”. This notion of authenticity comes from the construction of the self by the self, even if this is still a subjective and composed situation. The ‘realness’ acts to expose the “something” that holds up the “nothing”. Here the selfie creates a separation between the ‘real’, oversharing self that enacts their hyperactivity, and the hiddenness of this in the everyday. The photo acts to provide visibility to an invisible and does so through the control of representation lending to a notion of authenticity in the image. This is furthered in the case of the participant with ADHD mentioned above by the name of their Snapchat account being ‘X’s Head’ (where X is the person’s name), giving a sense that their posts are sharing the internal, actual self.

It is not clear that control is fully granted to the selfie taker however. When talking about transition videos and the communities they form on YouTube, Horak notes that they are emancipatory in the sense that they have allowed for a personalised representation of the trans experience, rather than one dominated by the mainstream media. However, he also notes that “YouTube should not be mistaken for a utopian space. The popularity of transition vlogs, and of hyperactive, predominantly white vloggers, institutes hormone time, beauty, gender cohesion, and whiteness as uncomfortable norms” (2014, p.582). The oppositional, subversive space has formed its own restrictive genre. This is true of selfies. Whilst self-photography takes away the other of the photographer in traditional portraiture, social media platforms and the communities on them restrict what is considered a desirable image.

For mental health and body positivity Tumblr appears to be the most extreme example of this constraint. Every person who was interviewed who currently or previously used Tumblr mentioned both how nice, but also how toxic, it was as a place. This is nicely summarised by one of the interviewees as “Tumblr I feel is kind of like the safest place to put selfies because you’re kind of like expected to be narcissistic but at the same time as expected to hate yourself.” The control over the image is both expanded and constricted here. In one sense,



Figure 7: ‘Mirror Selfie’ 12/05/18

these communities are really positive. They make people feel comfortable with posting personal stories and others respond and validate these. Large care communities have formed around different mental illnesses, and these have been crucial in people’s recovery, for example #anorexia and #anorexiarecovery together have over 7 million public posts on Instagram, almost all of which are pictures of food or selfies, with people charting, and sticking with due to the sharing, the overcoming of their eating disorder.

At the same time, these genres are also exclusionary and force people to express their health in a certain manner. On Tumblr the expectation to hate yourself allows an ease of posting

pictures of self-harm or captions detailing an anxious panic attack, however it also forces people to hyper-visualise these elements in order to gain recognition. Selfies not to do with the mental disorder are not shared or responded to as much, with validation mostly being given to those who have constructed their online identity solely around their illness. This leads to a shallow performance of identity and a loss of this notion of “honesty” or “truth” in the depictions. This restriction also leads to, as one of the participants said, a “cyclical” problem with “everyone feeding into everyone’s issues and not really like bettering, not encouraging people to get into a better place.”

These restrictive genres, while an issue, are still subversive in some sense due to their creation of an oppositional norm, which can still, in part, reveal the “something” holding up the “nothing”. Moreover, each platform has its own genre surrounding the posting of content, and all the interviewees who had stopped using Tumblr moved to a different site where they felt better able to express themselves. On top of this, these genres have formed out of a desire for validation from others, and they succeed in providing that. Berlant states that “because of our desires not to be defeated by life, we enter into the scene of relationality that is also and ultimately a demand for collaboration, relationality disturbs fantasy enough that it is open to crazy controls and also to absorbing and generating new social relations” (Berlant and Edelman 2013, p.110). It is this relation to, and collaboration with, others that leads to new genres but also what allows us to continue on through life.

The idea that individuals should get all their validation from their own self is not a possible form of life, especially for those who are structurally denied a positive conceptualisation of themselves. Instead selfies, against a trend in the rest of popular media suggesting the need to “love yourself” (Figure 5), provide empowerment through “(re)constructing confidence and receiving acknowledgement” from others (Nemer and Freeman 2015, p.1833). These platforms are not utopic spaces, however they do allow for more room to move around in than

offline life, and in doing so attempt to push at the boundaries of the generic every day by visualising an invisible.

The Hidden Visible

If selfies are going to be understood as subversive through what they make visible we will need to understand the concepts of visibility and hiddenness. Crucially it is not just the increase in control allowing for the 'internal' to be shown that is important, but also the socio-cultural reception of that image that matters. Butler's (in ed. Fraser and Greco 2005) discussion of Rodney King and the video of him being beaten by police as reproduced in a racially saturated field of vision notes this need. What should have been a video making visible police brutality against a black man was used as evidence for the acquittal of the officers. The content cannot be taken outside of racist episteme it is reproduced in.

A more recent example of visibility occurring in a racist field is described by the hip hop artist J. Cole in his song Neighbours. The lyrics detail how visibility isn't necessarily beneficial for the black body with: "Black in a white man territory/Cops bust in with the army guns/No evidence of the harm we done/Just a couple of neighbours who assume we slang/Only time they see us we be on the news in chains" (2016, 2:10) The song tells the true story of him setting up a recording studio in a wealthy neighbourhood in North Carolina. The white neighbours assume, because of the large quantities of black people going in and out of the house and the fact the racist cultural knowledge produces them as criminals, that they are dealing drugs and so call the police on them. The music video then shows the CCTV footage of a SWAT team arriving and breaking and entering. It is due to situations like this that Dean (2016), using the work of bell hooks, declares the "#visibility" movement to suffer a white feminist narcissism which is blind to the imperial gaze constructing a different social status for black women which has

been held not just now but also historically. This is also true of the ableist episteme that selfies are distributed in.

Bull uses Wittgenstein's concept of 'aspect seeing' to explain different forms of hiddenness. Here a distinction is drawn between seeing someone 'as an alien' and seeing them 'as alien'. In the first instance, seeing a human 'as an alien', there is just a misrecognition where coming to see them as a human involves deciphering so from their appearance and behaviour. In the second case where someone is seen 'as alien' the as structure to see them as human is missing. It is not just an instance of seeing someone differently (now seeing them as an alien, now as a human), but seeing them in a different way. This is similar to how even if robots are seen to have the same behaviour and appearance as a human we do not recognize them as such. The as structure to see them as human is missing. Whereas a human dressed as a robot may be seen as a robot, then come to be seen as a human when we recognise the behavioural traits.

Here, "acknowledgement differs from traditional accounts of knowledge in its recognition that the acceptance of other minds is not a matter of establishing their existence but of opening oneself to them ... This is something more than simply seeing" (1999, p.204). It is not an identification *of* a body, but instead an identification *with* a body. This is important: selfies can act to make visible the hidden, however the issue is not an identification *of* the black or disabled body, but instead an identification *with* such body, to see commonalities. The oppressed body is objectified instead of seen as a subject, and selfies, as photographic objects, further this objectification supposedly in the name of subversion. It is through this that embodied mental illnesses can be both hyper-visible, but also an invisible Other.

Not only are selfies-as-care that work to increase visibility not necessarily subversive, they are also used to discipline back into the norm. "This is not the straightforward imposition of dominance on a subordinated minority but an example of the legitimization of the principles of

social organization by virtue of their appearing to originate from everywhere” (Foucault, cited in Burns 2015, p. 716). The construction of narcissism as gendered, and selfies as narcissistic, acts to legitimize the outcry at “vain” and “attention-seeking” women who take these self-images. In turn these women become valid targets of punishment and correction in comments under images, or elsewhere both offline and online. This works to further the policing of the female body.

An example of the construction and disciplining can be seen in the Chainsmokers song and music video “#SELFIE”. Some of the lyrics are: “I only got 10 likes in the last 5 minutes do you think I should take it down (take the selfie off Instagram)”. On top of this, the singer never allows or cares about anyone responding to her and instead the song is one long monologue. These elements clearly portray the act of taking a selfie as one of self-indulgence. The band has also replaced their usually male lead vocal with that of a woman, furthering the gendering of the act. This clearly resonated with a lot of people, with the music video on YouTube having received 526,966,439 views.

Beyond the gendering there is also a relation to care. In the chorus one woman is supposedly having a conversation with another in a nightclub and it follows the pattern of: we should go and do x (smoke a cigarette, get a drink), “but first, let me take a selfie”. Here the selfie is situated as an act that breaks from the regular life of the club. The statement of ‘but first’ places the photography as something distinct from the rest of the club life, which will then be moved back to once the picture is taken. The content of the selfie itself is meaningless to the song, and in the music video we never see the actual picture taken by this woman. What matters is that the event, the taking of the photo, happened (The Chainsmokers 2014). #SELFIE relates the selfie to the act of self-care as maintenance, as taking a break from everyday life to be able to continue surviving once it is moved back to. Crucially then, this song doesn’t just highlight the intertwining of narcissism with selfies, but also with self-care. Popular culture like

this arises out of the construction of selfies, self-care, and narcissism as gendered, and also acts to reproduce this in society. This legitimises the female selfie taker as Other, as abnormal, to be pushed back into the 'correct', 'normal' form of life.

This disciplining is especially bad for mental illness due to the visual nature of madness:

“During the classical period, madness was shown, but on the other side of bars; if present it was at a distance, under the eyes of reason that no longer felt any relation to it and that would not compromise itself by too close a resemblance. Madness had become a thing to look at: no longer a monster inside oneself” (Foucault 1988, p.70)

This quote points towards the fact that madness had become no longer identified *with* the human even though it was still seen. Where, in the Renaissance era, the apocalypse and the 'other world' were the big dangers to be safeguarded against, moving towards the mid-18th century, madness became the enemy internal to us all. However, with the exclusion of it in internment asylums, this Unreason within every person was separated out and there was no longer a commonality between the 'normal' world of Reason and the Other. Madness was left a thing to be viewed from the position of the norm, and through this mental health is seen similarly.

“As for a common language, there is no such thing; or rather, there is no such thing any longer; the constitution of madness as a mental illness, at the end of the eighteenth century, affords the evidence of a broken dialogue... The language of psychiatry, which is a monologue of reason about madness, has been established only on the basis of such silence” (Foucault 1988, pp.x-xi)

Not only is mental illness left as something to be seen, it is also left with no voice. If there is speech it is through the language of Reason, with speech about mental illness being that of the clinician about the patient while they remain silent. Therefore, selfies and captions purely

trying to visualise the ill body will be buying into this ableist discourse by speaking through the discourse of exclusion and othering. When self-harm scars are shown it builds upon the disabled self as disgusting. Disgust is Nussbaum's term, noting that there are commonalities between responses to bodily wastes and, in the case she is looking at, homosexuals, but this is also true for madness. As Foucault has noted Reason doesn't want to associate itself too closely with mental illness for fear of contamination. This is an irrational disgust response where "even to look closely at what a gay teen does is to be defiled" (Nussbaum 2010, p.xii) – specifically "if object A is disgusting and B looks like A, B is also disgusting" (Nussbaum 2010, p.15).

Attempting to make others identify *with* the body shouldn't be a task which crushes difference though the process of buying into the norm. White, ableist, heteronormative culture works though, as bell hooks states, "eating the Other", where "the acknowledged Other must assume recognizable forms" (1992, pp.21-26). On top of the need to become recognizable as human, there is the need to reclaim difference from the hegemonic acceptance of the disabled or black self which commodifies these Others. Instead of accepting black culture in all its forms, there is a flattening of difference and an appropriation of sections of this life into the white norm. The parts that are appropriated are those that let the status quo to remain, while still allowing the proclamation of acceptance. This is how the black body can be fetishized in popular culture, both sexually and as a profitable tool, with musicians and actors like Beyoncé, Donald Glover, and Kanye West all being foregrounded as 'American culture' even though they talk about the racial oppressions of the country⁵.

While a relationship that can be problematised, and in many instances works through different means, similarities can be drawn between these forms of racial inclusion and those of mental

⁵ See: amongst others, the recent Guardian article titled 'The Rise of Donald Glover: How He Captured America' (Bain 2018) is a good example.

health. Neurodiversity is a medicalised biological term for the inclusion and celebration of the neurological differences between those considered normal and those not. There are two issues here. One is that, in practice, there is not this positive reception to difference but instead an Othering of people who do not socialize or form connections in the culturally regulated norm. Where mental disorders are 'integrated' it is only the partial eating of the Other. The treatment of autism is a good example of this, where the neurological diversity is accepted only when behaviour is normal or productive – in a recognizable and acknowledged form. Autism is often stereotyped as allowing an individual to think beyond the possibilities of the 'normal' person, usually applied to an ability to do maths or a similar subject well. From this there arises a fetishization of autistic people where creativity is boosted, for example, as one Guardian headline says, 'Autistic Employees Can Give Companies an Edge in Innovative Thinking' (Jones 2016). Beyond this, the aim to neurodiversity itself is flawed. bell hooks states: "Hence, it is not African American culture formed in resistance to contemporary situations that surfaces, but nostalgic evocation of a "glorious" past" (hooks 1992, p.26). In the case of neurodiversity as a goal, what is celebrated is the biological and neurological difference, while rejecting the cultural and personal elements to illness that have formed in a society that constructs madness as Other.

Not only is the task of being recognized as human difficult for those already marginalized due to the irrational disgust response, the acceptance of the ill body is a violent act of making invisible radical elements of the self while hyper-visualising tolerable ones. More than just visualising the body, selfies can be understood as in need to engage in a deconstruction of dominant ideology and attack it, accepting and reclaiming difference in an overt manner, while, or separately, working within that ideology to subvert it by showing similarity and humanness.

Look at Me Looking at Me

In order to analyse what a selfie does other than simply visualise the self we need to analyse what a selfie *is* – how it is constructed. While one form of self-care for the interviewees seems to be a documentation of their memories and experiences, these self-images seem to break, in part, from this aspect of traditional photography. The Cartesian perspective when taking pictures of others places the photographer, and in turn the viewer, behind the camera as a transcendental subject, beyond the content of the image. Here the photo acts as ‘evidence’ that the event took place, as documentation. This is noted by Frosh as the ‘index as trace’, leaving an immortal ‘trace’ of those events that will not pass even when the content has done so. He also states the existence of another form of indexicality as well however, ‘index as deixis’. Where index as trace is “a material trace foregrounding the temporal relation to pastness, index as deixis is the pointing finger drawing attention to a present object” (2015, p.1609).

The selfie may work to document the present. However, it also, due to the relationship between the photographer and photographed as identical, notes the performative nature and communicative element of the image, stating: “look at me and see what I’m doing now”. This goes even further with the temporary photography of Snapchat and Instagram, both of which were noted as important to multiple participants, due to the index as trace no longer existing with the image disappearing after viewing or after 24 hours (Jurgenson 2013).

One of the interviewees brought along what they referred to as a ‘trash selfie’ (Figure 6). This depicted ‘trash’, in this case a dirty laundry basket, with the caption ‘it me!’. The participant stated they felt there was a trend of posting these images as ‘selfies’, in a broad sense of it being about the self, because it allowed them to mention their anxiety or self-deprecating feelings in a safe or joke manner: “Yeah, so obviously like with a trash can I would be like it’s me, and I’m joking, but also I’m not joking”. In the trash selfie there is the obvious sense of “see me showing you me” that Frosh (2015, p.1610) notes with the caption directing attention

to the possibility of looking at and seeing “me”. Moreover, it points attention to showing how they feel about themselves, directing back to the notion of ‘authenticity’ and the ‘internal’ self.



Figure 8: ‘Front Facing Camera Selfie’ 24/11/17

While Frosh is significant in noting that the selfie is a ‘gestural’ image, he only concludes that the photo states “see me showing you me”. There is an important step missed that goes further than this however. Instead of just “look at me showing you me” the selfie also says, “look at me looking at me”. There is a crucial difference here. What Frosh misses is the fact that, in order to take the picture, the self must gaze upon the self, either overtly, in the case of the mirror selfie (Figure 7) or through the front facing camera (Figure 8) as most selfies are, or indirectly with the back-facing camera. The selfie is both, at once, constructed for others and also constructed by the self. The gaze of the subject is both looking out of the image at the viewer, but also looking into a mirror at themselves. They are seeing themselves both made object by the external, and as subject in the reflection. This is a departure from the norm in and of itself as where else do we see the mentally ill getting to look at themselves and that be

presented on a public stage. Instead we only usually get cinematography depicting mental health as Other, or medical photography making the disorder scientific and clinical and removing it from the ill self in a violent act.

Sontag writes that “there is something predatory in the act of taking a picture. To photograph people is to violate them, by seeing them as they never see themselves, by having knowledge of them that they can never have; it turns people into objects that can be symbolically possessed” (2005, p.10). There is a separation between those who see and those who never get to see. This is particularly true with medical photography. Lalvani talks of how Cartesian anthropological photography created the scientific idea of race, and in turn constructed the modern racialised body (1996). This is also true for the disabled body. Medical images have furthered the idea of the ill body as other, to be excluded.

Gilman, when talking about Morrisroe’s subversive artistic portraiture of himself with AIDS on a hospital bed, mentions that there is an assumption of a visually marked, ugly and undesirable body, however that this is combatted through a sexualisation in combination with the vulnerability (1995). Morrisroe deconstructs the discourse around illness through subverting the depictions of his experience with AIDS and ultimately his death. Selfies can attempt to be transgressive through their visualisation of the mentally ill body, but they also importantly go further through making obvious the composition hidden in the supposedly objective, and scientific images. While the images may make claims to some sense of authenticity, with the person in the self-photograph representing themselves as they ‘truly’ feel, this also foregrounds their subjectivity. Where the composer is hidden behind the camera, along with the viewer in traditional photography, making invisible the arranging of elements, the personalised positioning is clear in the selfie. Moreover, the fact a person can depict themselves as they want to be seen means the images are often taken to be a “highlights reel”

or not what someone “actually looks like”, but instead a photoshopped version with the negative elements hidden.

Returning to the idea of the act of care making visible that the non-event, the “nothingness”, is held up by “something”, we can see subversion occurring beyond just showing the body. Here, then, there is an association *with* the disabled self as human in offline interactions. Effort goes into making the self ‘normal’, usually still just an acceptable and commodified Other. However, there is then a distinction drawn between the online and offline self, where the selfie on social media breaks from this aspiration to normalcy and acts as a safe space. The foregrounding of the personalised construction of the self-photography, along with the distinction between the online and offline self, points towards the creation of the self in the picture, but also in offline ‘reality’. Here there is a combination of the linking of the disabled self that is accepted as human and the mentally ill Other, with the highlighting of the ‘unacceptable’ difference. The ‘mad’ self is shown to be the same subject that is acknowledged as human, yet at the same time the Unreason, hidden in everyday engagements, is still visible. The act of subversion is limited to those who are able to make themselves identified *with* offline however, a situation denied to many who cannot put the effort in, or where it is impossible, to hide part of themselves, but instead are hidden by society as a non-human Other.

Returning to the RuPaul quote in figure 5, “if you can’t love yourself, how in the hell are you gonna love someone else” (2017), there is a second reading that reveals a second way the selfie can act to be transgressive as a form of care. Where before this was taken to mean you should love yourself externally to the world, and selfies were counterposed to this as allowing for a more realistic form of validation including others, this prioritisation of the self can also be taken as a radical reclamation of narcissism. Goldberg (2017) talks about the critique of selfies as narcissistic as a claim that removes difference. Narcissism, in popular belief, refers to the idea of an over focusing on the self at the expense of relationships with others. However, as

mentioned already, due to its use in disciplining ‘deviants’ back to the norm, this accusation is one that works at the expense of otherness. Instead there is a need to reclaim a queer version of narcissism that respects difference, while focusing on the self and rejecting the world.

The original myth of Echo and Narcissus by Ovid is a tale about the goddess Echo, and Narcissus who is the object of desire. Narcissus rejects all his suitors, and, after rejecting Echo, she calls out for misfortune to fall upon him. As a result, the gods smite him for his insatiable desire for himself, and, upon seeing his reflection in a pond, he becomes infatuated and passes away due to not being able to drag himself away. Here Bruhm states that “as Narcissus rejects Echo and the boys who want him, he rejects ... the dictate to desire another (a socially prescribed and approved other)” (Bruhm, cited in Goldberg 2017, p.5). Lunbeck (2014) notes how the current conceptualisation of narcissism arises out of the psychoanalytic tradition, from Freud, who links it with homosexuality. Here, the homosexual is such because, unlike the ‘normal’ heterosexual, they have failed to move beyond childhood self-love, and as such, desire the self, or those like the self – the same gender. Instead of taking Narcissus as he who has too much desire for the self, as the negative critiques of self-love and self-absorption seem to suggest, he should be taken as the person who “rejects”.

Narcissus, when ‘self-absorbed’, is rejecting the social obligation to create the correct social bonds, and in doing so to reproduce the constraints placed upon him as a failed Other. Just as selfie takers are accused of inhabiting an unreal space and presenting a fake ‘perfect’ version of themselves⁶, Narcissus is pre-occupied with his own image and unable to return to the needs of his ‘real’ self. Goldberg, through his queer reading of the myth, reveals that the ‘real’ in this allegation is a discursive proxy for ‘normal’ society. As such, through rejecting the ‘real’ world, the selfie taker is rejecting others and reclaiming desire for the self. This problematizes

⁶ See: amongst others the BBC article ‘The Truth Behind Selfies and the Life of a Typical Instagram User’ (Anonymous 2017) is a good example. The meme ‘Instagram vs Reality’ also demonstrates and builds into the accusation, as can be seen in its least sexist form in the BuzzFeed article ‘A Day in the Life of a Girl on Instagram vs. Real Life’ (Parker 2014).

the very notion of the 'real' world. Placed before as a situation we are required to focus on to be legitimate, selfie-takers reject the actions and desires of the norm and expose the real as a disciplinary construction. Reading RuPaul's mantra through this light leads us to take the "if you don't love yourself" to be a claim towards rejecting the other that constricts you and loving yourself as an act of care.

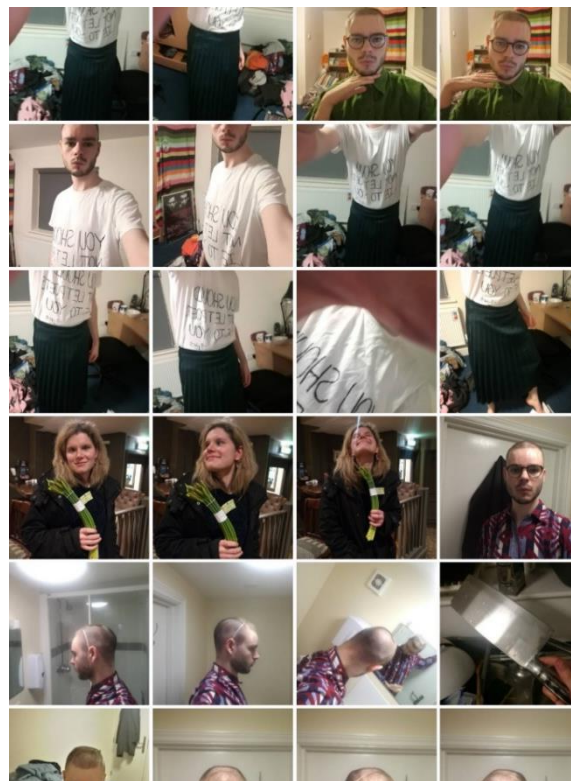


Figure 9: Phone Camera Content 02-03/02/18

Missed in this queer reading of 'Echo and Narcissus' is the importance of the character of Echo and her relevance to this discussion of selfies and care. Where Goldberg focuses on the male character of Narcissus and his relevance to a queer reclaiming of self-love, it is important, especially alongside the gendering of narcissism and selfies, to note how Echo can be read through Foucault's conceptualisation of the denial of language for the mad. "she of the echoing voice, who cannot ... learn how to speak first herself ... Echo only repeats the last of what is spoken and returns the words she hears" (Ovid 2000). Just as Foucault notes the silencing of the language of madness along with its exclusion in the Classical era, Juno silenced Echo after she tricked the goddess. Both are forced to speak the language of another in order

to describe their situation – the mad having to echo the language of Reason to describe their Unreason, and Echo having to use Narcissus’s speech to describe her love for him.

Everyone who spoke about their mental health in my interviews either expressed their illnesses through the language of clinical medicine, or explicitly stated that they thought about it within the context of their discussions with their councillors or psychologists. As has already been discussed, the language of clinical medicine “is a monologue of reason about madness” and “has been established only on the basis of a silence” (Foucault 1988, p.x-xi). Therefore, the participants, when trying to talk about their disorders, are doing so through the language of another –voicing their ‘madness’ through a discourse of Reason.

Echo, however, manages to express, in part, her feelings for Narcissus. Through the process of being rejected she reclaims her ability to convey meaning while still only using the voice of the other. Given the inability for the mentally ill to break out of their place in history and the manner they have been constructed, there is an impossibility of being a transcendental subject with the ability to create a new mad language. Instead, there must be the (re)claiming of the language of Reason that has formed in the silencing of Unreason, just as Echo uses the other to convey meaning.

Through both the rejection of societies dictations to become a ‘normal’ subject, as well as through (re)claiming language, it is possible to see how selfies can act to be subversive. A narcissistic form of care, where the self works to love the self, can be seen particularly in figure 8 and 9. Figure 8 shows a front facing camera selfie with photoshopped editing highlighting the love of the self with captions talking about how great the photographer/photographed self is. Figure 9 shows the many selfies taken that are never posted, only kept stored on the phone, and are for personal use only. Both of the cases shown are my selfies, however mimic similar photos as those discussed by participants in the interviews. These acts consisted of a form of care, with participants using the photos for many reasons. In one case the participant was

taking a picture because they felt they looked attractive that day, and in another the interviewee was attempting to reduce anxiety about physical features by looking at themselves and taking photos until they were happy with how they appeared.

Here the images are less a statement of “look at me showing you me” and more about “look at me looking at me”. The reclamation of narcissism is foregrounded. Instead of taking the selfies for others, these acts of care are taken for the self. The disabled subject’s confidence in their own image is improved through gazing upon themselves rather than through others’ confirmation. This refusal of the ableist gaze is an act of care, but also transgressive in its rejection of entering into a communication with the ‘reality’. Through this acceptance of the role of the failed subject there is a (re)claiming of the language of narcissism.

On top of this, in many of the selfies discussed in the interviews, there was a (re)claiming of the language of mental health. These selfies continue to be dispersed in an ableist episteme where the visualisation of mental health is taken as Other from behind bars, however there is a ‘double madness’ in these images. The mad are constructed as such and excluded, but also there is a madness in the acceptance of the position as, and in the use of the language of, a failed subject. Through this the selfie denies the right of the viewer to gaze upon the subject as if the image were constructed for them, instead the image commands to be seen specifically as the mad self looking at their madness and accepting their difference.

While this subversion doesn’t attempt to gain an identification *with* in order to be realized as human, it prioritises the highlighting of ‘unacceptable’ difference in an attempt to make clear the status quo is ‘eating the other’ in their only partial integration. This understanding of reclamation is similar to Ahmed’s when noting: “As with other political acts of reclaiming negative terms, reclaiming wilfulness is not necessarily premised on an affective conversion, that is, on converting a negative into a positive term. On the contrary, to claim wilfulness might involve not only hearing the negativity of the charge but insisting on retaining that

negativity: the charge after all is what keeps us proximate to scenes of violence” (2013). There is an acceptance of the position of madness. Instead of attempting to become part of society, or to reduce the violence in the labelling and act of objectification, the insistence on remaining “proximate to scenes of violence” is what allows transgression. It is the madness of opening yourself up to be labelled as mad, and accepting this position, that makes the selfie crucial as a form of radical care.

While reclaiming the language of narcissism would be significant, it is also important to remember that there are valid charges that do not attempt to discipline back into the hegemonic norm. Returning to the accusation of “#visibility” selfie feminism as a white feminist politics, bell hooks notes its “narcissism so blinding that it will not admit two obvious facts” (cited in Dean 2016). This is not a discourse disciplining the self-photographer, but instead a legitimate claim over the fact that some feminists ignore racial difference. Therefore, while the critique of narcissism may sometimes be used as a tool to flatten difference, it can also be used to call out oppressive acts. It is imperative then that when there is a ‘queering’ of the concept the reclamation is also done in a ‘queer’ manner to avoid further constrictions upon others.

Beyond narcissism, the command to “look at me looking at me” works to bring the self in the image into the present. When talking about beauty Coleman and Moreno Figueroa state that it is an “inclination to a perfected temporal state which involves processes of displacement to the past and of deferral to the future” (2010, p.357). Here beauty is taken to be something which, instead of being felt in the present, is an inclination to another temporal state where the self is thought of as normal. An aspiration to normalcy is identified by Gimlin as the reason for women to diet, exercise, and so on (cited in Coleman and Moreno Figueroa 2010).

Berlant’s concept of ‘cruel optimism’ is useful for looking at the way beauty works. She defines cruel optimism as “when something you desire is actually an obstacle to our flourishing” (2011,

p.1). The notion is about being stuck in the object world you exist within, where the object you desire and believe is necessary for life itself, is actually the very same object that causes the stifling of the good life in the first place. It is the object that offers a promise of a better life, and through that allows us to continue on living, while at the same time restricting life. The American Dream is an oft described example of this. This ideal is the goal of life that makes it possible to continue. It provides the potential of a better life and the 'freedom' it promises becomes life itself, with no valued existence outside of it. However, at the same time, the American Dream is a cruel force which, while attached to, compromises the very opportunity to achieve flourishing.

Beauty, for Coleman and Moreno Figueroa, is a form of this cruel optimism. There is the promise of a life of beauty in the future or a remembrance of a glorious past that allows the subject to continue moving on in the world, however, at the same time as making life bearable, it restricts the ability to feel normal in the present. This idea of an aspiration to a normalcy never located in the present can be tied into concepts other than beauty as well. Those with mental illnesses and constructed as Other are denied the right to the comfort of a dependable base in the current from which to accept themselves, and as such can strive for being seen as human in a different temporality. Linking back to the selfie as an act of looking at yourself, and the viewing of it as "looking at me looking at me", the image works to destabilize this cruel optimism and push for a reclaiming of normalcy in the present.

The taking of selfies was an anxious moment for many of the participants for this research. Not only was there the fear of other's judgements of narcissism, there was a noticing of the self by the self, usually denied to those excluded and made to only be viewed by others.

"Participant: ... um but yeah no I definitely used to post more selfies.

Interviewer (Me): Why do you think that is?

Participant: Um because I was a lot more insecure in my identity and used it as like a sort of tangible way of identifying myself as something, as someone, ... “

Here, almost explicitly, the participant brings forward the importance of being able to see themselves, and take a photo to record this, is stabilizing how they felt. This act of seeing herself as “something” and as “someone” nicely correlates to the objectification of the self in the index as trace, and the subjectification, or touching the person in the present with index as deixis. Index as trace brings forward what Jurgenson states as “the nostalgic gaze”. Here, “the present is always apprehended as a potential past” (2013). He goes on to say that temporary photos on social media platforms like Snapchat, due to their inability to document with their disappearance, foreground the present as the present, rather than a prioritised relation to the past or future. Selfies also do this. Unlike temporary photographs they still allow for the index as trace as they can be stored to look back on, however they still contain the index as deixis, which is what brings the viewing of the photograph back into the moment of the present.

Coleman and Moreno Figueroa come up with a conceptualisation of hope as an alternative to (cruel) optimism. Through “a return to and recognition of the unfulfilled actuality of the present [there is] a means of challenging the difficult present by re-experiencing the past” (2010, p.371). Here, the looking at images of the past self allows, not a bringing of that feeling to the present, but a noting that the self can be beautiful. Instead of a temporal connection to the past or future where those selves are seen as separate from the current self, hope allows a collapsing of these relations into an understanding that the photo is of the present self, and as such an understanding, based in the ‘now’, that it is possible for the self to be beautiful. This is similar to the index as deixis in the selfie, and moreover, the act of looking at the self in the taking of the image.

“I mean like very frequently when I take selfies I am absolutely feeling myself and I think I’m literally hot as shit and then I’ll look at the photo and go “damn yeah”. But I

guess that's where the negative comparison comes in because I guess I'm, if I look back at that when I'm not having a good self-image day then I'm like oh wow I guess I have the potential to look hot, but I don't anymore."

This quote from one of the participants who identifies as recovering from an eating disorder reveals the role of the selfie as both pushing normalcy to the past and future, as well as collapsing the temporal relations to have a positive understanding in the present. The index as trace in the selfie allows for a negative comparison of the self in the image with the self viewing the picture – "I guess I have the potential to look hot, but I don't anymore". On top of this there is Coleman and Moreno Figueroa's 'hope' in the looking back at the photo and going "damn yeah". This is not so much a thinking of the current self as beautiful, but rather a noting of the relation to the past "hot" self. Beyond this however, in the production of the selfie there is a gazing of the self upon the self. As separate from traditional portraiture, where the subject could not see themselves until after the image was taken, only to view them as they were in the moment of shooting, selfies require a look in the moment itself. This can be seen in the "when I take selfies I am absolutely feeling myself and I think I'm literally hot as shit". The self on the screen, or in the mirror in the case of the mirror selfie, is the other self with which there is an identification of beauty. With this there is a link made between that other, two-dimensional, self, and the photographer.

Sticking with Coleman and Moreno Figueroa's statement that it is not possible to have a present beauty, only the collapsing of temporalities, with 'hope' as opposed to 'optimism', in the taking of the photo, the gaze doesn't necessarily make the subject themselves feel beautiful in the current moment. Instead it collapses the distinction between the "hot" image-self and the photographer as far as is possible, creating joy in the here and now of the selfie taking. The act of care for the self, as a break from the everyday through taking a self-photograph to solidifying identity and reducing anxiety, has had transgressive effects in its

exploitation of hope through the collapsing of temporal relations with the past and future and returning to the present.

When looking at the above analysis of how selfies can act as a form of care, both as maintenance and subversion, it is crucial to note their links to the neoliberal technosocial context. Not only is the idea of 'taking a break' commodified, for example with multiple interviewees mentioning how care in the UK has become tied to the cosmetics shop Lush, and in particular their bath-bombs, but care has become necessary for the functioning of capitalism. Beyond this, multiple authors suggest that depression, amongst other mental illnesses, "is in fact the obverse of performance – a response by the subject to realize and be responsible for himself, to surpass himself evermore" (Dardot and Laval, cited in Wilson 2018, p.292). Therefore, in order to talk of selfies as transgressive it will be necessary to analyse how they interplay with the technologies of modern capitalism.

Mental Health, Self-Care, and Capitalism

Some theorists claim that the practice of self-care is not as subversive as thought⁷, with the neoliberal technologies of the self already demanding care as allowing, and necessary, for productivity, constant change, and improvement. Foucault notes that capitalism both helped construct madness as Other in the 18th century, and also leads to mental illness and Unreason to occur in the contemporary era due to the alienation involved in its linguistic, economic, and social relations. "The cardinal sin in that world of trade had been defined; it was no longer, as in the middle ages, pride or greed, but sloth" (Foucault 1987, p.68). Sloth, or unproductivity, was then linked with madness, poverty, and disability, all of which were then put in internment. This process was part of the construction of what we come to see mental health as today.

⁷ See: Davies (2015), and Cederstrom and Spicer (2015).

Measures introduced to deal with the 'mental health epidemic' are often implemented less as a means to help those who are struggling, but rather to push them back into work due to the loss for the country if these people take days off or likewise. One of the main reviews undertaken by the current Conservative government about mental health was titled 'Thriving at Work', with Theresa May giving a speech stating the negatives of mental health as "£42 billion each year" with this being the reason "we need to take action" (Prime Minister's Office 2017).

Furthermore, Foucault states: "when man remains alienated from what takes place in his language, when he cannot recognise any human, living signification in the production of his activity ... he lives in a culture that makes pathological forms like schizophrenia possible" (1987, p.84). Here he is pointing towards the fact that capitalistic relations are the cause of mental illness's prevalence. A more extreme example of this would be the recent debates over the status of 'burnout' as an illness. There are calls for burnout syndrome, a set of symptoms brought about through over stress and lack of enjoyment of work, to be treated, in part, as its own distinct disease (Bianchi, Schonfeld, and Laurent 2015). While those suffering are certainly in distress and justified in going to therapy as a form of care, the medicalisation of symptoms only acts to cover up an important cause of burnout – the structural problem of the hardships of labour under neoliberalism.

On top of the construction of care through capitalism, according to Wilson "neoliberalism governs through technologies of the self, and so self-care becomes central" (2018, p.160). Technologies of the self are a Foucauldian term described as those "techniques that human beings use to understand themselves ... which permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies" (Martin et al 1988, p.18). According to Wilson, with the financialization of everyday life and the privatization of happiness under neoliberalism there is an incitement to look inwards and focus on

transforming the self. The financialization of daily life is the process by which the self comes to be nothing more than capital to be appreciated over time. Risk management and regular auditing of the self through reflexive practice become key, such that even our relationships to others come to be played out economically – based on personal gain and loss. Turkle puts this nicely as: “financialization necessitates narcissism, but a narcissism that is not about excessive self-love, but self-fragility” (2011, p.177). The understanding of narcissism as self-fragility here is distinct from the queer reading based in the admiration of the self and rejection of the societal norm. Instead it is an indictment to value others based in what they can provide to the self.

With the privatization of happiness there is a proliferation of self-help books, increasing academic support for the positive study of happiness, and a reduction in public infrastructures to help support people. Contemporary society places individual’s emotional states in their own hands. Just as neoliberal capitalism leaves people considering their economic fortunes to be their own fault, hiding the structural forces that have an influence on outcomes, it does the same too with emotional fortunes. This leads to individualised practices of self-care, but instead of subjects acting by themselves in a manner that subverts, they perform in line with the status quo and remove their health from the political and structural realm.

With both mental illness and care placed in relation to the need to improve as an asset, acts of care in popular culture are less about taking a break or subverting the socio-cultural structure, instead being about doing exercise because it is a “miracle cure” to mental illness that will boost productivity, as one article by the Daily Mail suggests (Stacey 2017). Wilson states that these actions of caring for oneself “are certainly cutes of coping, getting by, and, at times, survival. However, these practices of self-care encourage us to internalize and thereby live by, the very same neoliberal logics of privatization, self-enclosed individualism, and personal responsibility that are causing all of these hurts in the first place” (2018, p.164). These

technologies of the self are therefore another example of Berlant's notion of cruel optimism (the first being 'beauty' in the discussion of Coleman and Moreno Figueroa (2010)).

With the notion of cruel optimism, we can see how even those practices of self-care which attempt to be subversive are not. Care of oneself as coming to understand or appreciate the self, or exploring the limits placed upon subjectivity, are not a failure of the genre of neoliberalism, but are part of, and, in fact, a crucial element to, the genre itself. Berlant notes that "even the prospects of failure that haunt the performance of identity and genre are conventional ... those blockages or surprises are usually part of the convention and not a transgression of it, or anything radical" (2008, p.4). Self-care, instead of being subversive, is part of what makes the genre of neoliberalism 'interesting and rich', and it becomes a form of cruel optimism where the subject is stuck in their object world.

With care individualised and financialised, it is communities of self-care that allow for a return to transgression. On social media networks form which provide support and help differentiated peoples survive together. Twitter hashtags fit this nicely. Twitter feeds move beyond each individual act of self-care and the focus is placed on the communal, with the continuous scrolling of each post all linked to the same theme in line with the hashtag searched. There is not so much a single personality that comes to dominate, as there is a collectively created space which sometimes is used to combat a norm of the convention.

The community of care can recently be seen with the trends such as #disabledbutcute where people post selfies of themselves to highlight that they have an illness, mental, physical, or otherwise, but that they are still 'cute'. Here, there is a highlighting of the larger structural elements through participating in care for oneself, not as an individual, but as part of a larger collective. The disability, and usual othering of the 'abnormal' body, in #disabledbutcute is no longer a purely private sentiment but a common experience. Horning states that the "selfie is shorthand not just for pictures you take of yourself but instead for one's self in social media"

(2014). Where some processes of subversion rest upon the individuals content of the image, the collective of selves on social media may be a crucial element in others. The individualisation of care is combatted, not through the personal enactment of care, but instead with the non-importance of the representational elements within the network. The collective of selfies provides a possibility of no longer taken through Turkle's neoliberal narcissism, but instead represent a reduction of personhood to the platform posted on.

Horning notes the neoliberal nature of the main platforms where selfies are posted however. "The selfie doesn't invent a language of identity; it marks a voluntary entry into established codes, reinforcing their validity even if a particular selfie tries to subvert them ... The selfie breaks us out of the cage of static identity, but the platforms they are posted on shove us back in, associating and attempting to integrate all data they generate" (2014). The reduction of the individual to the community doesn't attack neoliberal individualisation when the community reduced to is one controlled by the capitalist algorithm that reinforces the system. According to Horning, in order for the selfie, and the enactment of care through them, to be of importance, the platform posted on would have to already not be capitalistic.

While it is the case that posting selfies does buy into the status quo in many ways, this is true of all acts within the capitalist spectacle. Any argument that a political performance works to fully transgress the system, as if acting as a transcendental subject, is misplaced given the construction of the self within the discursive framework attempting to be broken out of. Lorde states: "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house", and it is true that the selfie has arisen within and become appropriated by the 'masters' as their own. The points raised by Horning and Wilson are fully correct for some selfies, and partially true for all selfies. However, they miss out the truly radical nature of self-care enacted by 'undeserving' groups. Lorde importantly goes on to propose that "[the master's tools] may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game" (1984, p.112).

The reclaiming of the selfie as a tool for care doesn't allow a dismantling of the house but provides the possibility of survival and a temporary transgression. The representational content of the selfie does matter, with the visual (re)claiming of the self in the self-photography allowing for subversion of certain norms, for example through the queered narcissistic picture in the case of the discussion of Echo and Narcissus above. On top of this, the excluded self, even if they are recreating themselves in line with neoliberalism, is re-inventing in ways that are not recognised or acknowledged by the status quo. This underpins the hegemonic order in some ways, however still highlights difference with the unacceptability of the non-appropriated parts of their existence.

Ahmed denies the claim that self-care, for those who are 'undeserving' of time, attention, or welfare, is a neoliberal, rather than radical, act.

"In refusing to care for him, we are judged as caring for ourselves, where this 'for' is assumed as only and lonely. Self-care: that can be an act of political warfare. In directing our care towards ourselves we are redirecting care away from its proper objects, we are not caring for those we are supposed to care for" (2014).

Where this research so far has been noting specific subversive elements to selfies enacted as forms of maintenance, Ahmed states that all acts of taking time out to allow continuing existence are radical when done by individuals who are usually denied the privilege of doing so. The deserving bodies are those who are in a less precarious position. While tragedy may happen even in privileged lives, it is this crucial access to existing communal structures that help in relief of pain. For those who are not deemed worth caring about these structures are ones they need to create for themselves, either individualistically or through the creation of a community. The narcissistic and individualistic act of recreating themselves, taking a break, or existing separated from 'reality', is crucially combined with a critique of the structure when redirecting away from the 'proper objects'. Self-indulgence is a crucial element to the political

when taking time from those deemed worthy and attempting to survive where the selfie taker was no meant to. Through the discussion of the relation of selfies, care, and mental health to neoliberalism we can see how self-photographs (re)produce the status quo – they both recreate it as the norm and generate new signification through the forms of subversion.

Conclusion

Selfies are enacted as a form of self-care for those identifying as having mental health issues in many different ways, some as a break from society, others also to subvert the status quo. As forms that enable a reprieve from the struggle of the everyday, the selfie lets those with mental disorders concretise memories or experiences, along with identity, through documenting them. In the process of documentation there is also the distraction from the harsh moment and an ability to take time to think through feelings. Ahmed's use of Lorde's idea of 'self-care as warfare' posits these situations as subversive, where the undeserving 'mad' self is re-allocating resources in the order and helping build systems of support to survive. The selfie allows this as a result of returning control to the taker, not allowed in traditional photography.

Self-photography can be transgressive through other means as well. "Life/Death: the paradigm is reduced to a simple click, the one separating the initial pose from the final print" (Barthes 1981, p.92). Barthes, here, highlights another theme throughout this analysis, that of the nature of the photograph as a recording of the present as an 'already past'. The taking of the picture separates the current from the printed evidence of its existence. For Barthes, when viewing the portrait of his recently passed away mother, there is the highlighting of impermanence while the image fades and that situation, lost as a present to the taking of the image, is also lost to time. The selfie pushes this temporal relation to the past and future into the present through its nature as an embodied gesture both showing the viewer the self, but

also commanding to look at the self looking at the self. This allows the selfie to engage in the possibility of bringing the aspiration to normalcy and beauty out of a form of cruel optimism though hope and joy. It also provides an engagement with narcissism, allowing for a reclaiming not just of self-appreciation, but of the visualisation of madness as Other.

The final section of analysis critiques care and selfies as neoliberal acts. While Ahmed's response is critical to pay attention to, it is also crucial to note that selfies are neither utopian nor revolutionary. They are not a perfect form of care and reproduce many repressive characteristics in the production and distribution, however, when used by those with mental illnesses create new meaning and allow a signification of the self - a radical move for the madness excluded and Othered since the 18th century.

Not talked about in this research is the participant who rarely, if ever took selfies. This person could not conceptualise the act, with the gazing upon their own body and the stress of sharing this to others, as care. Instead it was an intense moment of anxiety. This anxiety was also mentioned by those who did take selfies, yet it was a joyful anxiety that stabilised their identity and brought forward self-confidence in being able to visualise themselves under their own means. When it is hard to love your image, the taking of a selfie can be impossible. Yet when the anxiousness that come along with it becomes a hopeful moment and the disabled subject is allowed to appreciate the self, a truly important event has taken place.

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