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Narcissus, Self-Surveillance, and the Virtual Doppelgänger

To what extent do these terms exist in selfie and photographic culture, and what psychological and sociological influences do they have?

Georgia Hepworth

**A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield for the Degree of Master of Arts by
Research**

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Abstract

Selfies are regarded as being a benefit and affliction of mediated social media behaviours. They are a central, not a marginal or trivial, area of Western Culture and for many selfies are an everyday practice. Through researching selfies, my objective is to generate new insight into how selfies can affect their takers on a psychological and sociological level. Initially, I found that research into this area was predominantly focused on the aftermath effect of selfies. Examining how selfies evoke discussions about non-authenticity, heightening insecurities and encourage narcissistic behaviours. Rather than looking primarily at the after-effects, I created a body of research that explores the motivations and psychological components that are urging people to take selfies. I used existing theories as a skeleton for modern reevaluation and application. Alongside using critical and contemporary photographic practise as a method of reflecting on my findings. Additionally, coining new terminology such as the virtual doppelgänger to encourage a new perspective in the way we consider selfies and people's social media presence. Equally, how different factors such as gender and age influence their style and rationale for taking selfies and sharing them online. My research provides a perspective that examines the prior motivations for taking selfies, what can occur during selfie-taking, and how this ultimately affects takers and Western society psychologically and sociologically.

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Introduction

Key words: selfie, self-portrait, social media, Narcissus, narcissism, self-surveillance, virtual doppelgänger.

Self-presentation has prospered throughout art history, existing in different mediums of portraiture. A portrait is defined as representing a distinct individual, however this is far too simplistic a description that does not explain the ambiguities or intricacies that arise from portraiture. Before the invention of photography, a painting, sculpture or drawn portrait was the only viable way of recording an individual's or one's own appearance. From an art-historical perspective, Western societies visual history has been flooded by complimentary portraits of monarchs, important figures or the upper class who could afford to commission portraits. Due to this there is a plethora of portraiture's visual evolution over time, which enables us to identify how portraiture advanced into what exists as today.

Portraits always represent something surrounding the body or the face. Shearer West in her book *Portraiture* explains how a portrait can serve as a representation of the subject's social or artistic conventions. As well as representing the sitter's inner life such as their character or virtues. Portraiture's capacity to do this makes it a very powerful mode of representation (West, 2004). Portraits have always existed as more than just a record of an individual, but they have also been used to show the beauty, importance, power, and wealth of the sitter. Portraits have almost always been created with the intention that they should be a flattering representation of the sitter. For example, Ancient Greeks and Roman's portraiture was created to idealize qualities deemed to be worthy of admiration and emulation. During the Classical period in Ancient Greece Athenian philosopher Plato embraced the notion that beauty and art were characterized by perfection. Plato believed that art ought to be "apt, suitable, without deviations" — in short, "perfect".

(Tatarkiewicz,1976). Showing a generalized perspective into how the Ancient Greek's approached portraiture, and how the cognitive approach in creating portraiture reflected their social conventions. The Ancient Greek perception of perfection is further discussed in chapter 1.1 with Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio's portrait of Narcissus (figure 2) and articulates how social attitudes would have influenced its creation.

The duality of likeness arises as a topic of debate when discussing portraiture. Characteristically you would expect early portraiture, especially commissioned portraits would resemble a likeness to the sitter. However, it is not always possible to compare most portraits with their sitters, and therefore our impression of the likeness it resembles to the sitter lies within the skill of the artist. As mentioned, the Ancient Greeks and Romans are two examples of periods in history where creating a desirable enhanced likenesses of the sitter was normalized and preferred. Yet, there were artists such as William Hogarth (1697–1764) and Francisco Goya (1746 – 1828) that explored representing the sitter in an unflattering similarity or arguably more humanized light. This was achieved through lingering on facial or bodily details that could be considered as unsightly. In turn this prompted a shift in the approach to traditional portraiture.

Artists exploring attractive and unattractive aesthetics further influenced societies over history and what was regarded beautiful or ugly. Katy Kelleher in her article *Ugliness Is Underrated: In Defense of Ugly Paintings* discusses ugly aesthetics in art and particularly portraiture over history. She notes how “Beautiful art is at its best and most useful when it illuminates truths about the human condition, but bad art can reveal the inner workings of one individual's mind” (Kelleher, 2018). Kelleher provides the example of Leonardo Da Vinci when discussing the insight into the inner workings of a person's mind, and how Da Vinci used ugliness in portraiture to search for beauty. He began to interrogate ugliness through a “series of disgusts”

in which he drew his sitters to appear intentionally unattractive in order for these unaesthetic individuals to contrast with the beauty of Da Vinci's other sitters. Therefore, reinforcing the societal notions of beauty by contrasting it with deliberate displays of features considered to be conventionally ugly during the Renaissance (14th – 17th century). In addition, this concept of reinforced beauty standards within portraiture has arguably been carried into contemporary society and has influenced how people externally present themselves for others to observe. While typically commissioned portraits still have the incentive to be flattering and hold an authentic likeness to the sitter.

Self-portraiture ensuing the 20th century saw the rise is artists beginning to unpack the psychological aspects of the self in their work. Self-portraiture requires a level of training and material proficiency. Self-portraits are created over a stretch of time, accentuating the artist's inner life rather than their external appearances and manifest the individualist sense of self. Art Critic Galina Vasilyeva-Shlyapina distinguishes two forms of the self-portrait. Vasilyeva-Shlyapina explains how there is a professional portrait, in which the artist is depicted at work versus the personal portrait which reveal moral and psychological features (D'Clark, 2016). Egon Schiele's self-portraits provide an entry into psychological understandings of his mental state and inner emotions. The self-portraits of his large series of watercolours and paintings created between 1910 and 1918 are prime examples of the psychologically complexity and self-articulation that can arrive through self-portraiture. Schiele was an expressionist painter and his fixation for the "obscure" and even the obscene scandalized many, but his exploration through self-portraiture allowed him to refine his style and visually expression his psyche. Expressing an emotive insight into his inner turmoil without verbalization. In the article *Egon Schiele: Self-Portraits and Portraits* Agnes Husslein-Arco and Jane Kallir how "Schiele aptly illustrates what in the field of

drawing is referred to as “meaningful marks.” It refers to the manner in which drawing (freed from academic convention) is, like music, a most immediate form of human expression. (Husslein-Arco and Kallir, 2011). Schiele’s self-portraits emanate curiosity and represent his exploration into human emotions, the complexities, and divisions of human personality. His self-portraits further present evidence of searching for a desire to understand and self-analyze.

When technology began to advance and become more accessible self-portraiture evolved. Photographic self-portraiture prospered in the 1970s when inexpensive instant cameras enabled a new medium of self-expression, capturing personal insights into otherwise conservative individuals and allowing amateurs to learn photography with immediate results. This as an overarching mode of easily self-preserving and exploring bled into modern-day society. Contemporary self-presentation now includes what we define as a “selfie.” Selfies evolved from self-portraiture as a photographic and artistic genre, becoming aesthetically and sociologically pertinent, now more so than ever. They are an intersection at which art history, philosophy, sociology, and design all meet (Timir, 2019). Frequently, self-portraits have been judged as narcissistic and egotistical where oneself is the primary subject. Especially regarding selfies, with those who participate more regularly in selfies taking and sharing being labelled as narcissistic. Understandably one cannot know the intentions of every individual who chooses to take and share a selfie. Nevertheless, selfies and self-portraits should not exclusively be viewed as solely narcissistic in my opinion. Though, by using visual analysis and new insights, my research proposals can shed some light on the leading factors. Therefore, leading my preliminary hypothesis to be selfies are not always motivated by narcissistic tendencies.

Despite the relation selfies and self-portrait share, Ellen Oredsson stated, “saying that selfies are simply the equivalent to self-portraits actually downplays the uniqueness of selfies as an artistic

medium” (Oredsson, 2016). The term selfie has become immersed in our culture that not only has the term been officially entered into the Oxford English Dictionary, but “selfie” was Oxford English Dictionary’s Word of the Year for 2013 (Alonso, 2014). There are distinct compositional variances between selfies and other modes of self-portraiture. An example being selfies are characteristically taken at arm’s length or directly into a mirror. Meanwhile, self-portraits are created and composed by using memory, picture, or reflection as a guide. In this instance, I will be referring to selfies as the image taken of oneself, by oneself, on a mobile device. Either captured on a front-facing camera, in a mirror reflection or of the selfie-taker using a timer feature. This classification avoids references to self-portraits that have been debated to qualify as a selfie due to their compositional nature. For example, street photographer Vivian Maier, since she would take street self-portraits in window or mirror reflections.



Self-Portrait; October 18, 1953, New York, NY (Maier, 1953).

Figure 1 depicts the typical style and angles that appear in selfies, but also that this style is present in self-portraits. However, selfies have a distinctive and identifiable format. Due to the proliferation of selfies taken and shared on social media daily, an unspoken formula that makes them identifiable has emerged. Leading to the easy dismissal and lack of connection to selfies, due to the vast amount of them we are exposed to. A self-portrait is more singular in its nature, arguably requiring more skill and precision, and is therefore considered as being more precious than a selfie.

Selfies are often branded as devoid of skill due to the simplicity of mobile technology and its accessibility. But what is it that superficially labels selfies as being "lowbrow"? Is this due to their affiliated demographic (adolescents)? A question I aim to explore in chapter 2, subchapter 1 through analyzing Laura Pannack's *Digital Self Esteem* series, which is an exploration of how selfies are affecting adolescent self-esteem. We assume that selfies encourage a preoccupation with self-image, with this leading to other negative associations becoming attached to selfies, such as narcissism. Conversations about narcissistic tendencies link to considering the motivations behind the impulse to take a selfie, and this is where my research resides. Are selfies really to be labelled as more narcissistic than traditional forms of portraiture, such as a painting or those taken with a camera? My research alternatively uses the myth of Narcissus to show new considerations in philosophy around the act of self-gazing, and how this can apply to taking a selfie. The word narcissism originated from the story of Narcissus and Echo and evolved over time to become a highly specialized psychoanalytic term. Outside of its correctly contextualized usage in psychology, it has dwindled to be used to describe the behaviour of excessive selfie-taking. Rather than selfies stemming from narcissistic tendencies my research aims to debunk this approach by presenting new methodologies. Methodologies include the terminology I use throughout my

research, such as the virtual doppelgänger, a term devised by myself, and the notion of self-surveillance.

The virtual doppelgänger as a term will be used to contextualize the online persona an individual has when they edit and share their selfie in the digital sphere. Rather than being centred as a copy or likeness of a person, the virtual doppelgänger describes our digital alter ego rather than a physical one as portrayed in popular culture, in literature such as Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. Self-surveillance as a concept and term originates from Michael Foucault's panopticism, referenced in his book *Discipline and Punishment*. Panopticism is the disciplinary model of a central observational tower positioned within a circle of prison cells. The guards in the tower can observe the inmates, but the inmates are unable to see into the tower. This principle establishes the idea of an internalized awareness of being watched, and therefore acting accordingly to this consciousness. Furthermore, by using Foucault's model of the panopticism, paired with the idea of internalized self-surveillance, it aids in understand why people are taking selfies, and why they may opt to editing or manipulating them.

An outline of current research regarding selfies seems to largely focus on the process and aftereffects of taking selfies. Concentrating on what happens to a selfie when it has been taken and then establishing patterns that arise in selfie culture, such as editing, angles used, poses or facial expressions. Certain practitioners that are included in my thesis who have delved into this area of research include Alicia Eler (2017), Ana Peraica (2017) and Will Storr (2017). I utilize their proposals and findings to contribute towards developing my research. Contrary to these writers, I intend to research and look at selfies in an alternate way, by looking at them before they are created and during the taking process. I want to develop a psychological and sociological understanding of *why* people are taking selfies the way that they do, and to understand what is the thought process

behind the selfie. Erin Gloria Ryan (2013), Sarah Cascone (2016) and Soraya Mehdizadeh (2010) all draw similar correlations that selfies are not motivated by narcissism but rather to use selfies as a method of validation. Yet, their findings do not provide a term for these internalised investigations and motivations. Through bridging the gap in terminology, by using terms such as the virtual doppelgänger it enriches the perceptions of how and why people become psychologically driven to partake in selfie taking. Additionally, to examine how factors such as gender are influencing this, as my research proposes that women and men will have different self-surveillance. The distinction between male and female selfie taking and self-representation is a key factor in understanding how one's gender can influence social behaviour and physical appearance. The gendered politics over self-presenting behaviour derives from masculine and feminine expectations throughout history, and the expectations that gender brings. Men and women culturally and socially have different presentational pressures, and therefore their behaviours vary in accordance to their respective expectations. The way that selfies negotiate ideas of gender in their distribution and creation, sociologically and psychologically is a concept I aim to discuss in chapter 3.2 *Women and Selfies*. Whilst also discussing the influences of the gaze (male and female) and how this contributes to gendered selfie taking behaviour.

The accumulation of these concepts guided me to my research, which examines Narcissus, self-surveillance, and the virtual doppelgänger. My research leads me to different conclusions by providing new psychological and sociological considerations. Initially the term doppelgänger did not apply directly to digital culture, due to the fact the term was coined prior to selfies. However, the benefit of forwarding the application of the doppelgänger is that it sheds light and new considerations into the theoretical discussions regarding selfies and digital culture. My hypothesis presumes that everyone partakes in self-surveillance, and it does not just occur exclusively for

selfies. It is an internal examination and reflective process that leads people to participate in selfie-taking. However, as women take selfies 8.6 times more on average than men do (T.J. Thomson, 2020) this leads to my initial belief that women's self-surveillance is different to men, and my research aims to establish the correlation as to why that is. Additionally, the virtual doppelgänger exists when talking about selfies but not in self-portraits due to the variation in motivation, intention, narrative, and social attitudes. Finally, selfies do not exist and are not created merely to receive the admiration of others or are created from narcissistic proclivities.

The order of my research follows the structure where chapter 1 serves as a literature review of my core theories. Throughout this chapter I establish the core ideas that are to be discussed and reference other sociological theories that aid in the understanding of my research. In chapter 2 I use two key practitioners Laura Pannack and Ryan McGinley. Each practitioner has produced a body of work that can be applied to selfie culture such as social media, disputes, and the act of taking a selfie. Lastly, chapter 3 focuses on discussions that are more concerned with evaluating how the key terms Narcissus, self-surveillance and virtual doppelgänger are affecting people and our visual culture. While also deliberating the influences they have and what the effect or consequences are.

Throughout my thesis, I use a mix of inductive and deductive research strategies. As clarified by Katrin Tiidenberg "inductive logic means that we let the observations of the world suggest new frameworks, concepts of theories. Deductive logic means we approach the observable world with premises of existing theories." (Tiidenberg, 2018). The inductive research arises in discussions through analysis of statistics, observations and this formed the term virtual doppelgänger which I was able to apply to the practitioners I have researched. I primarily adopt the deductive logic strategy throughout my research by using theories such as Michael Foucault's panopticism

(primary theorist), Erving Goffman's Frontstage Backstage theory, Edward L. Thorndike's Halo effect (secondary theorists) and concepts surrounding the doppelgänger. I was able to reexamine these concepts, and as a result I created new proposals which apply to selfies culture. Overall assisting in refining our understanding of why people take selfies, and how these factors are affecting selfie culture.

Chapter 1

1.1 *Narcissus – The Self and The Other*

Narcissus exists as one of the most poignant characters in Greek mythology, but despite the tragedy surrounding his story, we are able to derive two profound philosophical questions: the distinction between illusion and reality, and additionally that between the self and the other. (Spass, 2000). Over the course of history, myths are retold and altered allowing for new interpretations and narratives to transpire. Myths hold profound purposes, offering timeless questions about human experiences and world philosophy (Wood, 2015) and how cultures, such as Western Culture, are dependent on the use of myth in order to construct their own reality.

Widely varying definitions of illusion and reality are found throughout academic writing, it is valuable to define how these terms will be applied in this context due to the multitude of interpretations they provide. For Richard Gregory illusion is expressed as “departures from truth, or from physical reality” (Gregory, 1996). This suggests that an illusion exists in our reality as fiction, a departure from truth insinuates our observation of the illusion is perception misinterpretation. This could be achieved through various misconceptions surrounding our sensory experiences such as visual or auditory. In contrast to illusion, Taylor describes reality as “The world or the state of things as they actually exist... existence that is absolute, self-sufficient, or objective, and not subject to human decisions or conventions.” (Taylor, 2019). To conclude, reality is the totality of a system which involves actual things and that their existence is factual and sealed from notional or idealistic idea. Examples include events that factually happened or the life of a person. It is favourable to distinguish the difference between reality and illusion when discussing myths, as they can exist in a middle state of occasionally being based on reality. Reviewing or

studying myths has its own benefits, in this instance I am using the myth of Narcissus to aid in bridging the gap in literature to understand selfie culture. Narcissus' relationship with his mirror image for him was not an illusion, it was based on reality. However, identifying the distinction between illusion and reality is useful as in chapter 1, subchapter 3 I will use the concept of illusion while discussing the virtual doppelgänger. While discussing Narcissus though, I will analyze how the reality of mirror gazing affected Narcissus to draw further conclusions how self-gazing can implicate its viewer.

Britannica authors explain how “The world of myth provides guidance for crucial elements in human existence—war and peace, life and death, truth and falsehood, good and evil,” (Smith et al, 2020) and how by looking at certain myths we can gauge an understanding how this affected individual and societal behaviours. The mirror has existed almost as long as humankind, by means of visual self-reflecting. Stephanie Lowder in her own words explains that “by legend, the first mirror was formed in the ancient Himalayas when a little brook tarried to rest itself, as if to ponder and reflect upon its course. Thereby, in time, the first woman walked and looking down into the pool was surprised by—another girl!—which she slowly came to understand as a reflection of herself.” (Lowder, n.d.) Comparative to the myth of Narcissus, the opportunity of self-gazing naturally occurs in nature. Mirror gazing and reflection is a reality-based experience, meaning when we perceive a myth as having truth of the reality in which it was fashioned, we can gain insightful information about the values and beliefs of that era. Especially when regarding cultural attitudes and philosophies surrounding self-gazing, and how the development of the mirror as a physical object has affected our relationship with self-reflecting.

Taken from the Latin word *mirare* and *mirari* (“to look at” and “to wonder at, admire,” respectively), a mirror can be any reflective surface manufactured for the purpose of seeing oneself. (Lowder, n.d.) The mirror itself can be viewed as a mode of technology, due to its scientific prerequisite development. The materiality of mirrors has changed and is conditional to the culture in which it is created. The oldest mirrors were found in Anatolia, around 4000 BC, also later used by Romans and pre-Columbian Mexicans. They were black and made out of volcanic materials, such as obsidian and were hardly transparent in their form. Whereas the Egyptians, Etruscans, and Greeks made mirrors lighter by using silver, copper, and tin. Many mirrors were found in graves, evidently having meanings related to faith regarding afterlife, a practice that continues even today in some contemporary cultures. (Peraica, 2017). During the Medieval ages, mirrors were small and dark, and actually hazardous as they contained, according to Sara Schechner, poisons such as arsenic, besides silver, wine sediments or even tartar, antimony, brass, borax and English pewter. Perhaps for that reason they were seen as Devil’s instruments and served as undeniable proof that the women who used them were engaged in witchcraft (Schechner, 2005).

Different cultures have their own beliefs surrounding the mirror, but despite the variations of what it is made of, mirrors have been perceived as an object of fear, mystery, and obsession. Simple by nature but allows for complex connotations and associations to arise. Cultures throughout history have, independently of one another, built their own mythologies around reflective surfaces. In Ancient Greek culture the mirror came to be related to the negative morals suggested by the myth of Narcissus. The undesirable traits included vanity and dishonesty, rather than truth and humility. The mirror symbolically carried these associations steadily from the Renaissance Era. The Narcissus myth (popular interpretation) is him lovingly gazing at his face until he wasted away, to reprimanded him for his excessive self-love. Additionally, the myth’s

moral warnings also present themes about the power of one's reflection and the act of self-gazing. We continue to reference the myth because it remains relatable and relevant as we've all been drawn to our own reflection. Katy Kelleher comments that "there's both a power and a survival necessity in seeing yourself the way the world sees you" (Kelleher, 2019) meaning that the way we look matters, whether we want it to or not. It can influence our job and relationship prospects, in turn impacting to our quality of life. Society value various human bodies differently, with the bodies that fit the current culture's definition of beautiful being valued as superior. There's both a power and a survival necessity in seeing yourself the way the world sees you.

By articulating the importance of seeing our reflection, it benefits our understanding of sociological and psychological influences in our behaviour and cognition. Psychologist Tara Well discusses the neuroscience on how mirrors and reflections support our psychological well-being. One of her explanations is how "Reflections help us develop our sense of self" (Well, 2018). Well continues to explain how mirrors are used to test self-recognition by humans, and that if a person can tell that the image on the reflective surface is in fact them, then they have developed a cognitive sense of self. French Philosopher Jacques Lacan theory of the mirror stage attests to the notion of mirrors contributing to developing a cognitive relationship with oneself. The mirror stage is a psychoanalytic theory produced by Lacan, based on the belief that an infant (6 – 18 months) recognizes themselves in a mirror and develops a perception and consciousness of their self as an image. By the early 1950s, Lacan's theory of the mirror stage had evolved: Lacan no longer viewed the mirror stage as being a moment in an infant's life, but rather it existed as a permeant structure of subjectivity (Johnston, 2018).

The mirror stage existed as an influential moment in developing an infant's ego and relationship with their self, hereby if they enjoy seeing their reaction it promoted a positive

affiliation with their body. The mirror stage illustrates the conflicting nature of a dual relationship. The theory itself does not exclusively refer to the relationship between the ego and the body, but also debates the relation between the imaginary and the real. A similar theme as raised in debate surrounding the myth of Narcissus. In *The Double - The Virtual Doppelgänger* chapter I will further delve into how the selfie and its technology can impact people's egos and relationship with their self by using Lacan's mirror stage as the foundation.

Considering the symbolisms surrounding objects that encouraged self-surveying and some of the negative connotations they held, it is interesting to consider how stark and popularized the act of self-surveying is in contemporary culture. The development and manufacturing of technology throughout history actively allows us to experiment and tease our self-representation. This enables us to see how these advances have affected the way in which we participated in this act. Moreover, it allows us to examine how the contrasting genres of selfies versus self-portraits can influence the way in which we share, distribute, capture, and partake in photographing ourselves. Kodak and Apple Computer (Apple supplied the software for transferring the digital images to a personal computer) publicly introduced the first consumer model in 1994 (Editors of Encyclopaedia, 2020). In 2012 camera-phones began competing with professional digital technology. For the first time in history, all the social classes had the ability, accessibility and tool for self-reflection, self-presentation, and self-promotion. (Peraica, 2017). Despite the new convenience of front facing camera technology, self-presentation is much older than its technology. In the 19th century portraits were taken inside the sitter's house and very rarely outdoors, this was due to the huge size cameras that were impractical to carry. Victorian photographic sitters were staged, often involving chairs, armchairs, vases with flowers or

distinguishing furnishing. The environment was part of the representation and desired opinion the sitter wanted the viewer to have.

Going further back in history before the medium and technology of photography was created, paintings were some of the earliest examples of self-presentation. Being extremely common among the social elite, allowing for historical context and immortalization of the subject. Even early presentation didn't always follow realism or existing as a true likeness or accurate representation of its sitter. For example, Elizabeth I would paint her face white as it was deemed youthful and pure during the Tudor era, but additionally using cosmetics to disguise her true age, and mask her smallpox scars. This meant that when Elizabeth sat for her portrait, such as her Coronation portrait, her self-portrayal extends beyond pure vanity but rather to represent her as a gentle queen who represented the beauty ideals of her time. As Steven Mullaney states in *Representations of Elizabeth I in Early Modern Culture* “imbue the ageing natural body of the monarch with ageless aura of the body politic” (Mullaney, 2001). Showing how depictions of individuals were manipulated and influenced by social standards at that time. Regardless of these portraits being exaggerated or refined these modifications were driven by self-endorsing motives, showing humans were already creating false doubles and images of themselves to adhere to what they deemed was socially acceptable from an early age.

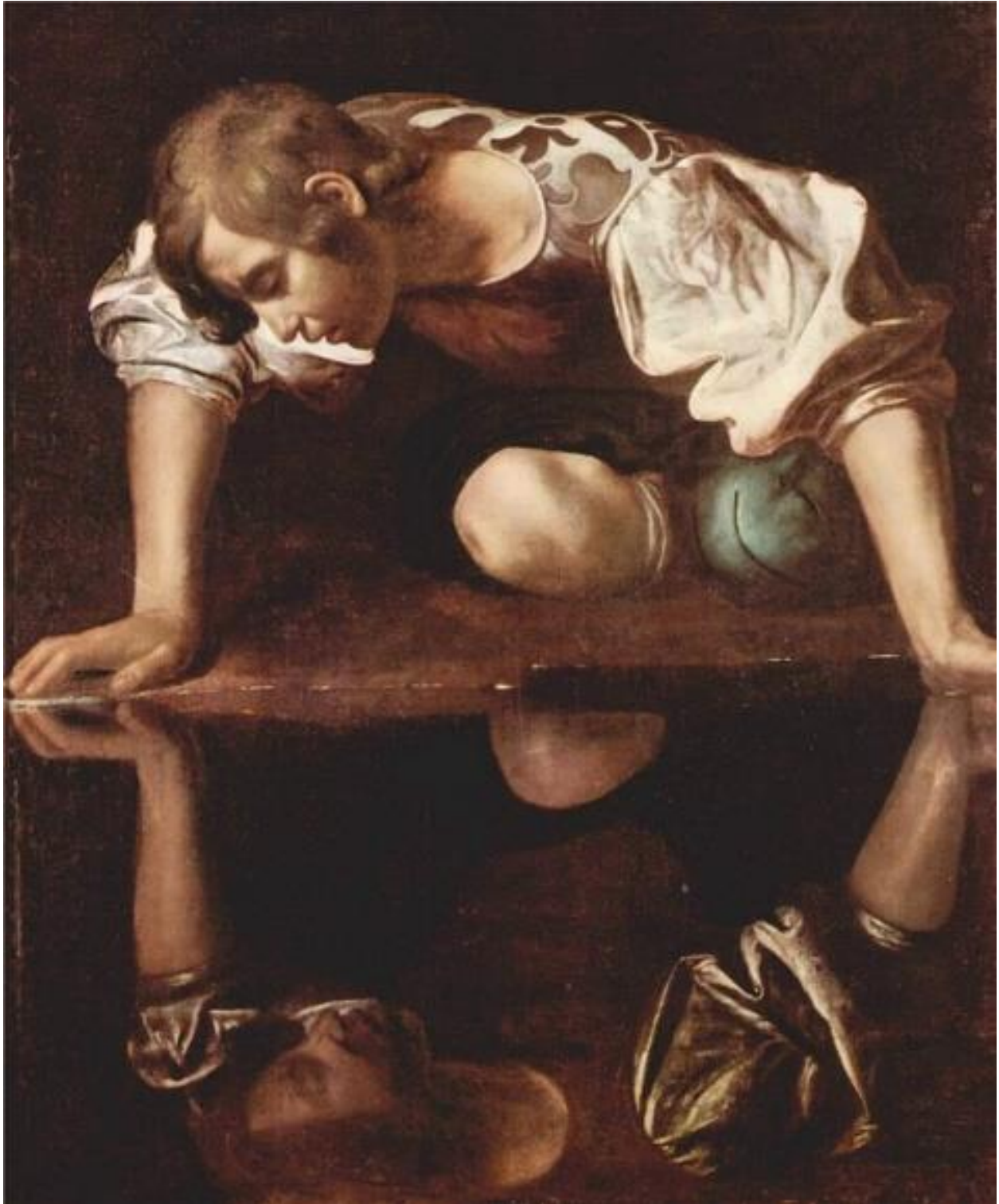
Sharon Mullooly describes how “there are distinct compositional differences between selfies and other types of self-portraits.” (Mullooly, 2016). The culture of selfies is visual, rather than literary, and therefore primarily ahistorical, non-narrative and non-critical. Selfies are ephemeral and non-important; they report on arbitrary moments and events appear important as any other day. (Peraica, 2017). Meaning that everyday moments get recorded and documented, leading to social media profiles they are shared to, to become a virtual diary of sorts. Recording the fleeting,

meaningful or milestone moments we may choose to share. Due to the fleeting nature and convenience of selfies it is easy to dismiss them as being narcissistic or purely being motivated by self-promotion. It is interesting to question what has changed within how we carry means of virtual self-representation. Different ontologies are conditioned by technology, but they are also monitored by the ideology of the image taker. This is something I aim to delve further into throughout my research, and how selfies can exist beyond the one-dimensional stereotype that they are solely vanity driven.

While looking at psychological factors throughout my research, it is prudent to also differentiate the self and the other when looking into identity. The terms are regarded as separate units but can be used collaboratively together when we discuss social media and having a digital persona or identify which juxtaposes our identity as it exists. Schalk clarifies the distinction of the self and the other by stating “The binary **of self** and **other** is perhaps one of the most basic theories of human consciousness and identity, claiming, in short, that the existence of an **other**, a not-**self**, allows the possibility or recognition of **a self**.” (Schalk, 2011). Further refining this explanation, the self is a person’s fundamental existence that individualizes them from others, you can recognize yourself as separate from others. My early assumption is that our reality identity we recognize as our self, but our other virtual identify is an illusion that we curate and present for other media users to consume and interpret as our **reality self**. These questions, terms and theories create analogies that are concerned with Western scopophilic culture and highlighting fundamental issues concerning our knowledge and identity.

The self and the other are primary themes in contemporary analysis regarding the Narcissus myth. Narcissus was distinguished for his attractiveness, but on his rejection of the nymph Echo,

the Gods, in an act of vengeance, reprimanded Narcissus by causing him to fall in love with his reflection in the waters of a nearby spring, until he inevitably pined away. (Augustyn, 2019). Varying interpretations of the myth exist, and enquiries as to whether Narcissus was in love with his reflection (his self (popular recognition) or if he in fact did not recognize himself and fell in love with the image he saw in the water (the *other*). Each alternative allows for a discussion around reflection and mirror gazing, but also how these can translate into present selfie taking behaviour.

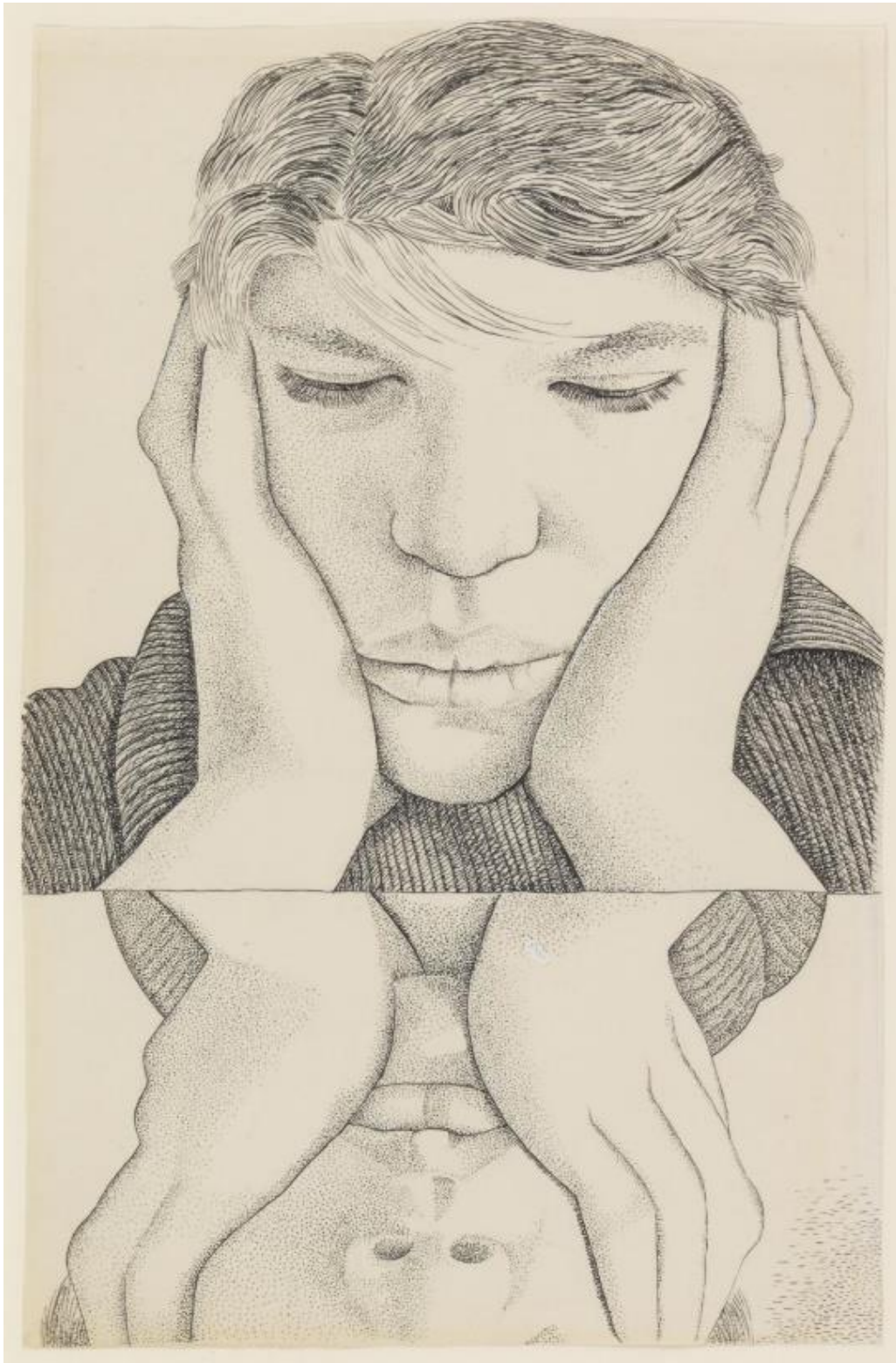


Narcissus (Caravaggio, 1599)

Figure 2 is one of the most recognized interpretive art pieces of the Narcissus myth. This interpretation of Narcissus, painted by Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, conveys a dark melancholy tone in its execution. Narcissus' eyes are shadowed deeply, and his self-hungry gaze is fixated on his reflection in the black water. Caravaggio's scene is simple and minimalist, the inky, unilluminated background amplifies the theme of Narcissus' self-yearning and obsession with his self. Painted in what we now deem as the Early Renaissance, the Caravaggio painting of Narcissus demonstrates the fascination, and almost obsessive degree of the classical perfection of renderings of the body. To the Ancient Greeks the human body was viewed as perfect, the perfect machine, and the Greeks had a deep respect for it (Goode, 2015). Caravaggio's exceedingly meticulous portrait of Narcissus depicts a realistic representation of the youth and idealized features Narcissus is described to have had. The realistic portrait paired with the dark contrasts and tones creates an emotive depiction of Narcissus. Additionally, emphasized by the proportion and framing of the portrait, which isolates Narcissus and gives the impression of inaccessibility to Narcissus' gaze or attention.

Additionally, Caravaggio's Narcissus portrait follows the traditional and widely acknowledged interpretation of the myth in which Narcissus falls in love with his reflection. Alternatively, some existing arguments and interpretations raise questions around whether Narcissus did in fact fall in love with the figure he saw but did not recognize as himself. The notion of Narcissus being infatuated by a figure he does not recognize as himself, he perceives an "other." This notion probes into inquiries surrounding preoccupying a false narrative. How we can experience or see an image of ourselves but do not recognize the doppelgänger of our likeness reflected as being our self, but rather we interpret it as being a fictional copy of our true self as fictional representation. When analyzing figure 2, the reflection bears an obvious resemblance to

its gazer, Narcissus. However, the reflection is harsher in tone, darker in shade and not as refined or as youthful looking as Narcissus himself. This creates a visible separation between Narcissus and his reflection allowing them to be interpreted as independent representations. Narcissus being youthful and the attractive embodiment of Greek values surrounding beauty and perfection, whereas the reflection symbolizes a duplicate. A parallel double but different in nature, darker in tone and reflective of the themes of isolation, grief and reinforces the premise Narcissus thought he was gazing at someone other than himself. This split between our reality self, and our reflected self will be further articulated and defined through doppelgänger analysis in the *Virtual Doppelgänger* chapter. Also, the way in which this reflected other exists as a separate but self-authored copy of oneself within the digital sphere.



Narcissus (Freud, 1948)

Isolation as an illustrative narrative is continuous throughout various representations of the Narcissus myth, even in more modern interpretations. Figure 3 is a modern interpretation of the Narcissus myth by Lucian Freud and carries forward the traditional themes surrounding the myth. The drawing enables broader concepts to be drawn through a mirror being used rather than a body of water, the art style, and the detail of it being a self-portrait. The composition and framing of Figure 3 are extremely interesting, the edge of the mirror is uncomfortably close to the subject's chin, creating a stark division of figure and reflection. The reflection is cropped above the eyes, meaning the gaze of Freud is assumed. We know the gaze is returned as the reflection is parallel to its gazer, but not being able to see the returned gaze isolates the subject, and Freud's self-observing becomes an individual experience, and we can only observe uninvolved and second-handed the action of him self-watching.

Elizabeth Manchester describes how "The subject is rendered a double object, enclosed in a circularized, interior world." (Manchester, 2005). Despite the reflection being cropped we can visualize the binary of Freud within the frame, he is doubled in his circular mirror. This becomes his interior world; his gazing becomes an internalized experience; his thoughts and emotions are private. Similarly, to how in Figure 2 the interior world is Narcissus relationship with the figure in the water becomes an isolated private self-involvement. Comparable to how our selfies become a double object of us, which then exists within the technological realm, which in this instance acts as the interior world. The front facing camera and our reflection we see, acts as the circularized interior in which we engage in while we articulate or carry out the act of taking a selfie. When engaged further, the act of staring and performing to the front facing camera while taking a selfie, can raise the topic of narcissism being present in this action. Peraica explains how "Gazing directly into the camera, using it simultaneously as a tool of narcissistic delight but also

of communication to the public.” (Peraica, 2017). Narcissistic delight could be defined as receiving pleasure from directly enjoying one’s appearance, as described in the prevalent rendition of the Narcissus myth. So, in the case of Figure Two, the narcissistic delight stems from pleasure in the self-gazing experience and being isolated in this interior circularized world.

Applying Narcissistic delight to selfie taking behaviour, the term implies that there is self-gratifying joy in taking selfies. Thus, implying the selfie taker is motivated by grandiose tendencies rather than for other reasons such as social compliancy. This narcissistic act therefore nourishes the ego through the instant gratification one can acquire from sharing selfies online. Related format to how we take a selfie, we return our own gaze, the gaze is mirrored back onto itself by using our reflection as a narcissistic tool and reducing ourselves to an object for consumption. As a result, this translates to a silent communicative language, when the distributed image receives an optimistic response, it positively reinforces that behaviour and encourages more of it. Therefore, the interior world becomes a state of self-pondering and a particular way of analyzing and reviewing one’s appearance. Correspondingly the composition of Figure 3 and selfie proportions is that they are framed in a way that fragments the subjects from the rest of their body. Alike to the way a selfie is framed, when held at arm’s length the lens on the mobile device is only wide enough to comfortably fit the image taker and a small portion of the background. Similarly, to the earliest mirrors, which by design were hand mirrors; those large enough to reflect the whole body did not appear until the 1st century AD. (Editors of Encyclopaedia, 2019). This design allows the selfie taker to also become perceptually disassociated from their surroundings, in the way Narcissus did from his surroundings. Arguably this raises the notion of in the act of taking a selfie there is the “creator” self (the consciousness of taking the picture) and subject self (turning oneself into an object for review).

Ana Peraica states in *Culture of the Selfie* how “Narcissus visibly falls in love with an ‘image’ without a body, or more accurately – a fiction.” (Peraica, 2017). Recognizing how Narcissus mistook the reflection in the spring as a separate person, informs that the reflection of his self in the body of water (equivalent to a mirror) numbed his perceptions to reality. Additionally, how he then succumbed into obsession, and was unable to distinguish reality from fiction affected by the perceptual disassociation with his own body. Factors which constitute towards being perceptually disassociated with one’s own body include feeling disconnected from your thoughts, feelings, memories, and surroundings. Philip Wang describes how dissociation is “losing touch” with awareness of one’s immediate surroundings” (Wang, 2018). An objective I aim to elaborate on when discussing Laura Pannack’s *Digital Self Esteem* series, and how the idea of dissociation fits into practice.

Dissociation can affect your sense of identity and perception of time, evocative that perceptual dissociation occurs when the viewer becomes detached from reality (as it exists around them). As well, somebody may have the sensation that they have unexpectedly become an observer of their own actions, or they may feel indifferent to their bodies. Suggestive that someone taking a selfie might feel different to their reflection, and significantly dissimilar to their social media identity and “self” representation. Moreover, this proposes selfie users may struggle to distinguish between their reality and fiction, similarly to Narcissus. By the means of falling into nourishing the narrated, edited, and performative virtual version of themselves. Leading to the distinction between reality and fiction is being distorted through maintaining this simulated persona. As a result, the selfie taker is becoming temporarily sensory-numb and getting absorbed into the mirrored parallel world that they are gazing at. Debatably this can be considered as another form of dissociation. Eleanor Cummins explains that how “dissociation exists on a broad spectrum. It’s

the feeling you get when you zone out during a moment occurring in the present.” (Cummins, 2020). To reiterate, Cummins description of dissociation correlates to the idea of becoming sensory-numb as losing awareness of in world reality while this act occurs. Explaining how a selfie taker can become transfixed on their mirrored self that is reflected at them through the mechanics of the front facing camera. This offers some insight into how Narcissus eventually perished due to his incessant self-gazing. If Narcissus became perceptually disassociated to his senses such as hearing, touch, taste and smell, his reality ceases to provide anything disruptive to him, he only can focus on his reflected likeness and seeing becomes the primary sense used. This sensory block enabled Narcissus to yield to his cursed observing and inevitably lead to his demise.

This idea is founded on self-reflection in a physical form, where the reflection and the gazing exist materially in real time. To apply this to contemporary visual culture it is important to articulate the way this could exist in a virtual territory (Peraica, 2017) and how the front facing camera falls into this category. The front facing camera acts as a digital mirror, allowing the holder to effortlessly move the camera and reflection around then, allowing immediate and fluent control over the selfie they intend to take. Selfies differ from the act of self-reflecting, as a person sees themselves alive, living and breathing, the way Narcissus did when he was self-gazing in the body of water. Smart phone technology such as the iPhone, when held at arm’s length, the lens is only wide enough to comfortably fit the image taker and a small portion of the background. This design allows the taker to also become perceptually disassociated from their surroundings, the way Narcissus and Freud did in figure 2 and 3, as they delve into the act of selfie-taking. If there is a perceptual disassociation present while we engage in selfie-taking behaviour, arguably the individual could lose their sense of identity, and occupy a performative or lens-based persona separate from their real-world identity. What’s more if this was the case, selfies that are distributed

via social media wouldn't correspond to the taker's authentic identity, meaning selfie takers unwittingly acquire a virtual and fictional identity. Agreeing to Peraica's idea that Narcissus fell in love with a "fiction" can imply selfie takers and distributors can become preoccupied by their virtual reflection, during and after the act of taking their portrait.

1.2 Foucault - Self Surveillance

The term Surveillance can be defined as the act of observing or the condition of being observed. Throughout this chapter I will articulate surveillance as an internal act rather than an outward action. Rather than focusing on techniques used to monitor and record societies actions through techniques such as CCTV, my concentration will lie on how the notion of the awareness of being observed can affect a person's cognition relating to selfie taking. In 1975 Michael Foucault explained his views on power and how it exists in society, how it is operated, obtained, and sustained. Foucault based the phrase Panopticism on Jeremy Bentham's panopticon. Bentham's panopticon is an architectural prison design, in which the design of a building allows the guards the agency to be able to observe each cell. The way Foucault discusses, the panopticon, is that it is used as a psychological tool to control inmates by subordination through the knowledge there is a covert omnipresence watching over. The advantage in the way the panopticon functions and how it effects inmate's behaviour is that "Inspection functions ceaselessly. The gaze is alert everywhere." (Foucault, 1975). This is achieved through the design of the panopticon, which features a tower that is pierced with wide windows that open onto the inner side of the ring. The periphery building is divided into cells, each of which extends the whole width of the building; they have two windows, one on the inside, corresponding to the windows of the tower. The other, on the outside, allows the light to cross the cell from one end to the other. All that required then is to place a supervisor in a central tower to watch over prisoners. This idea explores the depth of surveillance and control, an intensification, and a ramification of power. (Foucault, 1975).

Foucault describes that “The major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility.” (Foucault, 1975). This ties to notion of inmates being knowingly conscious they are being observed, ensured to prompt obedience of the people due to the omnipresence and visibility they are aware of. Due to the knowledge of being watched this meant the inmates self-surveillance impacted how they would behave in response to the looming watchful eye they felt upon them. Taking the notion of self-surveillance further do we as image and selfie takers take on the same self-surveillance? And do we therefore exist in a constant state of being observed and perpetual visibility?

Selfies and self-portraits hold a “to be looked-at-ness” quality, a term that Laura Mulvey writes about in her essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (Mulvey, 1975). By means of that selfies are produced more often than not, with the intention to be looked at. When we are frequently exposed to these specific types of images it has the potential to influence how we begin to perform and see ourselves. It impacts our self-surveillance when we self-gaze or take and share images of our self. When certain images receive more credibility and appraisal for having a certain aesthetic, it can encourage an individual to feel the need to perform in the same way to acquire the same level of appreciation. This lead to an internalized self-surveillance and awareness that we may feel compelled adhere to, and this becomes a behavioural pattern we develop.

Leo Steinberg in his interpretation, has defined the triangles between the real, reflected and depicted, showing three spaces as “representing representations” (Steinberg, 1975). In the case of the panopticon, the real is the guards in the tower able to observe discreetly. The reflected, is how it would be received or interpreted by the inmates the unawareness when they are being surveyed. Concluding with the depicted, which is how the prisoners would then behave and present themselves as a result of this perception of continual surveillance. In the case of selfies and self-

portraits, we can translate Steinberg's triangle of representations to explain self-surveillance in a photographic medium. Steinberg's representation triangle is formed of the real, reflected and depicted. Real would be our experience, appearance or personality that is genuine, unimitated and occurring in fact. Reflected exists as a deliberation of whether our self-surveillance encourages or discourages us to reveal an authentic representation of ourselves or not. Depicted is the outcome of the self-image taken, such as a selfie, and whether it is shared with others. It is also another way of describing representation, meaning that selfies allow self-authorship and allows the taker to choose how to present their self. Raising the idea of self-censorship in selfies and not picturing or sharing images that would be deemed as inappropriate, to avoid being socially chastised. Self-censorship will be discussed further in chapter 3, subchapter 2 and 3, regarding autonomy and feminine conformity.

Nick Crossley explains in relation to the Panopticon that the 'gaze' achieves its regulating effect because the inmate is "objectified in the gaze of the other"—there is a refusal to communicate on the part of the other. (Crossley 1993). Hereby meaning that the inmates are reduced to an objectifying status of being a solely a prisoner in the architectural design of the Panopticon, only for the gazing purposes of the guard in the tower doing the surveillances. If applied to contemporary visual culture, it can be described that we as civilians and social media users are reduced to objects or perhaps unintentionally reduce ourselves to objects for the gazing of others. The wider interpretation and foundation of the panopticon implies a physical prison space. Social media itself is not attached to a physical space but exists in the virtual space. However, the premise of self-surveillance can occur as an interior process which effects how someone takes a selfie and curates their social media profiles. I will further explore the idea of self-surveillance in practice through using the case study, Ryan McGinley's *Mirror Mirror* series.

By taking selfies through self-surveillance, we could begin to view and present ourselves as a visual object purely to be recognized as such, as selfies are visually driven. Yet, if we removed social media would selfies cease to exist in the same capacity they do now? When the primary source of instant reward and recognition can be drawn from distributing selfies on social media platforms, if this were removed would we survey ourselves in the same way? Additionally, would casual and avid selfie takers then end up viewing and photographing themselves in the same way?

Thomas McMullan writes how “Foucault used the panopticon as a way to illustrate the proclivity of disciplinary societies subjugate its citizens” (McMullan, 2015). McMullan’s comment is complimentary to Cedric Cordenier who references the presence of authority in the panopticon by stating “Power is visible because of the omnipresence of the watchtower, and unverifiable, because it is impossible for the inmate to know when he is being watched.” (Cordenier, 2011). This readdresses the notion of inmate’s self-surveillance involving a hyper awareness of their behaviour, and the understanding that they are being observed. Naturally, the awareness the inmates have would proactively deter them from behaviour in a way that would result in punishment.

It is important to note how the panopticon differs from social media. The panopticon was created and then proposed “as a way to trace the surveillance tendencies of disciplinarian societies.” (McMullan, 2015). Explaining how as an architectural design, it can be used as a tool to monitor how people behave in response to consciously knowing that they are being surveillanced, and how this can be used as a disciplinary tool. Foucault explains how from an inmate’s perspective living within the panopticon “is seen, but he does not see; he is an object of information, never a subject in communication.” (Foucault, 1975). Meaning the inmates existing in the panopticon serve as the act of surveillance in directed at the inmates to receive information

about how conscious and constant awareness influences behaviour. Rather than the inmates being able to communicate and express their thoughts, they simply exist within that structure to be observed. Social media was not created as a monitoring platform in the way the panopticon was proposed, but despite the similarities there are fundamental differences in the way they both operate.

Social media has information sharing qualities, similarly to the panopticon, users exist as objects of information that get consumed by others sharing selfies, pictures or accompanying words. Users also have the capability and autonomy to communicate, a feature which the panopticon did not allow. Social media and selfie takers can actively choose how to communicate their intended message and also receive information at the same time. The model of social media and selfie taking technology enables both. It is the concept of internalized self-surveillance, and that awareness I am drawing the argument from, and how this as an idea lives in the digital sphere. Self-surveillance in the selfie and social media aspect, differs from the panopticon as it is not used as a tool to police people or as a disciplinary psychological punishment.

Applying this to social media with self-surveillance and censorship we also have the awareness that anyone can observe and see what we are doing online if we freely share information. Contemporary Western society means we are surrounded by a plethora of features that enable us to share every viable detail of our day to day lives. Social media users do not have to share personal information and can have a private account or one that is not very active, if they desire. However, those who are avid users can share locations, adverts, selfies and so on. Leading to constant information consumption about those we follow. To talk about the way in which self-surveillance and censorship may act as a deterrent is through agreeing to Instagram terms and conditions. When you agree to these rules and regulations you agree that you will most post or say

anything that would breach these rules. This alone would mean that social media users would internalize the rules as a guideline for appropriateness, and it would influence how selfies are taken and how they are shared on that platform. In chapter 3 in *Pics or it Didn't Happen* I will further discuss how self-censorship and self-surveillance can operate. Additionally discussed in this chapter is what ensues when users breach Instagram guidelines, and why there is more active regulating of everyday users than what we deem as influencers and celebrities.

1.3 *The Double – The Virtual Doppelgänger*

As referenced in the *Narcissus – The Self and The Other* chapter it is pragmatic to refresh the notion of what the *other* is. I aim to clarify what it means for something to be considered as our other, and how it exists in our society. Also, to explain how I will be applying it to selfie and social media culture. Throughout this chapter I will define my term virtual doppelgänger and how I will be utilizing it throughout the rest of my research. Initially through researching the philosophy around the double, the term doppelgänger arose. The term “doppelgänger” was first referenced in the book *Siebenkäs*, a Romantic German published in Berlin in three volumes, by Jean Paul. Doppelgänger is a German word deriving from *doppel-*, meaning "double," and *-gänger*, meaning "goer" to refer to such specters (Vardoulakis, 2010). Simply meaning that doppelgänger is a double. Fyodor Dostoyevsky, Otto Rank and Sigmund Freud all introduced, adapted, and theorized the concept of the double into literature and psychology. With Dostoyevsky referencing the double in literature, Rank exploring the double as a representation of the ego and Freud developing these ideas into “the uncanny.”

First published on in 1846, Dostoyevsky’s *The Double: A Petersburg Poem* is one of the early literary introductions to the theme of the doppelgänger. The novel follows Yakov Petrovich Golyadkin, a low-level bureaucrat struggling to prosper. After being ejected from a party, on his way home he encounters a man who impeccably resembles him, his double. The plot explores how Golyadkin deals with their evolving relationship. The novel ends bitterly, after Golyadkin and his double become friends, the double begins to attempt to take over Golyadkin’s life. Ending with Golyadkin sanity taking a plummet and he begins to see an abundance of his doubles, which results in a psychotic break and is sectioned into an asylum by Doctor Rutenspitz. (Dostoyevsky,

1846). Critics have raised the point that focused on the idea that the novel explores Golyadkin's search for identity. William Leatherbarrow wrote that *The Double's* central idea is that “the human will in its search for total freedom of expression becomes a self-destructive impulse” (Leatherbarrow, 1973). Meaning that the act of searching for the ability to freely self-express and author oneself becomes a self-damaging compulsion. Which ultimately would have an adverse effect on one’s psyche and can affect someone’s cognition regarding self-expression. Hereby, when obsessively and actively trying to outwardly express one’s identity it becomes obnoxious rather than liberating.

When used in union with sociologist Irving Goffman’s frontstage and backstage theory, it infers how the idea of the doppelgänger can be relevant to someone’s personality. Goffman in 1959 published a book titled *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. The book presented the metaphor of theatrical production as an approach that aimed to offer an understanding of human interaction and behaviour. Referring to different behaviours that people engage in throughout their everyday life (Cole, 2019). Goffman’s theory proposes that we behave differently (perform various roles) in front of different people (what he regards as the audiences) and categorizing these roles into our frontstage and backstage personas. The frontstage persona is defined as the performance that is observed (Goffman, 1959). As clarified by Karen Sternheimer she explains how the social interactions were largely front stage and in public spaces (Sternheimer, 2020). Meaning that the frontstage persona is the one that is performed for social viewing and is performed in accordance with societal acceptability, the actor formally adheres to the principles that have meaning to the audience. Whereas in the backstage setting a person can relax, drop the frontstage persona, and metaphorically step out of character. The actions in the backstage are not to please anyone but the individual, hence why the backstage is regarded to be a person’s authentic persona. One that is not

performed or influenced by societal pressures (Goffman, 1959). I will additionally utilize Goffman's theory to explore how this notion can be applied to digital culture, by applying frontstage and backstage to a person's digital character versus their real-world identity. To reiterate, the frontstage persona represents the internalized norms and expectations for socially acceptable behavior which is how Golyadkin's double was perceived by others. His double had charm and social skills that Golyadkin lacked and was liked among Golyadkin's colleagues and peers, being presented in a manner that was well received to societies standards. Whereas Golyadkin represents the backstage personality, which is defined as the uninhibited or genuine personality, and as Golyadkin is the original he is the genuine identity. This raises the premise that the frontstage personality or the double has the possibility to exist as a negative influence in one's life. Which can figuratively take over or consume a person's life or mentality.

Freud also revised the notion of the double which was first explored in the psychoanalytic literature by in 1914 by Rank titled *The Double*. Ernst Jentsch originally formed the concept of the uncanny which was then later elaborated on by Freud in his 1919 essay *Das Unheimliche*. Both drew their inspiration from the short story of E.T.A. Hoffmann's *The Sandman*. Freud in his research into the double explores the uncanny and how it exists. Defined as the psychological experience of something as *oddly familiar*. In contemporary psychoanalytic theory, the notion of the uncanny can be described as the ambiguity whether something is actually itself or an other. The nature of the uncanny is idiosyncratic, and is entirely based upon one's own individual experiences, but haunts each of us to varying degrees (Ruers, 2019).

Rank studied the double from through psychoanalysis evaluation. First published in 1914 Rank's book was originally titled *Der Doppelgänger*, and when it was translated to English in 1971 the title became *The Double*. He explains that a preoccupation with the double of oneself

occurs partly as a narcissistic fixation. Signifying that having an excessive focus on one's double is a self-interested and egotistical mentality to occupy. In Rank's analysis the double refers to a representation of a person's ego, and can present in various forms such as shadow, portrait, double, twin or a reflection (Rank, 1971). This implies that encountering one's double has the ability to play a part in ego development or one's self-cognition. Roy Huss summarizes Rank's double premise by explaining that that "infantile narcissism creates an external immortal self to love" (Huss, 1972). Explaining how infant egotism creates an identity separate from their self to admire. Which serves as psychological reason for people having an interest in their personal doppelgänger, and where an infatuation with one's reflection can arise from. Rank's analysis corresponds with Lacan's mirror stage and denotes that a person's infatuation with their double (their mirror reflection in this instance) can occur in early developmental cognition regarding ego and self-recognition.

The term doppelgänger is often used in a neutral way to describe someone that bears a resemblance to another person. Stephen Wagner describes that "a doppelgänger isn't someone who just resembles you, but is an exact double, right down to the way you walk, act, talk, and dress" (Wagner, 2019). Describing how a doppelgänger is a physical replica of oneself. Traditionally, these doubles have been regarded as sinister or in some cases evil entities in many fictional and non-fictional mediums. A popularized fictional example being the fictional novella, Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, written by Robert Louis Stevenson and published in 1886. Explained by Vicky Lebeau the two characters represent alter egos of the main character, and how progressing over time they are the exhibition of the contradictory behavior, especially between private and public selves (Lebeau, 2020). In this instance Mr Hype symbolizes the worst of human personality and capability, which was one of the inspirations for the alter-ego and doppelgänger in many different

mediums and genres being regarded as antagonistic. Doppelgängers that occur in real life are explained as being a physical double but are not typically considered to be harmful, and in fiction they are regarded as our other personality, an alter ego (Wagner, 2019). In the literature references I have used the theme of alter egos, Mr Hyde and Yakov Petrovich Golyadkin's double, and use them as the antagonists of the central characters. Through the literary examples referenced, they both have the theme of the doppelgänger as having the potential to be harmful to the original. As shown in , Dostoyevsky's *The Double*, where Golyadkin's doppelgänger exhibited the better parts of his personality and existed as a more successful and together, compared to his genuine self. Which led to Golyadkin's declining sanity.

Establishing how online self-representation can co-exist with the notion of the doppelgänger can be articulated by understanding how online self-depiction operates. Priya Khanchandani in her article *Double Take*, for Frieze magazine describes how 'The realization that we can design versions of ourselves in the digital realm is crucial to our conception of who we are in the digital age. When "I" becomes not a literal reflection in a mirror but a representation on a screen.' (Khanchandani, 2021). Implying that the capability to create a digital version of ourself, that simply exists in a virtual medium, can influence how we view ourself in reality. In addition to this the "I" that Khanchandani refers to the reflection we see becomes an extension and another ego or persona of ourselves. Rather than a literal mirror reflection where we see ourself unfiltered and authentically, but instead a virtual rendition of our genuine in world self.

Mirror reflections are also considered as a doppelgänger. Lacan explains how self-identification is our first encounter with our own reflection, but I want to modernize Lacan's theory to be applicable to the digital and selfie era. As described earlier the front facing camera can also act as a mirror, meaning that when an infant experiences their own digital reflection via a mobile

phone, this is their first encounter with their virtual doppelgänger. Lacan explains that an infant's mirror reflection aids in cognitive self-awareness and ego development. Applying this to a digital reflection this assumes that a person's interaction and self-gazing to their virtual mirror image has an active effect on their cognitive relationship with their appearance and ego progression. To reiterate the quote by Huss, he explains that "infantile narcissism creates an external immortal self to love" (Huss, 1972). To interpret this quote from the virtual doppelgänger perspective, when an infant enjoys seeing their virtual doppelgänger it promotes narcissistic inclinations to a double that is separate from themselves to love. Meaning that this cognition becomes part of one's self-surveillance, and how they regard their self internally when mirror gazing. Overall, forming an early relationship with the virtual doppelgänger and can explain why selfie taking can be an enjoyable experience for some. It immortalizes and captures the narcissistic pleasure that arises during self-surveillance (Johnston, 2018).

These concepts aid in founding the term "virtual doppelgänger" coined by myself. The virtual doppelgänger exists as the digitally bounded representation that is generated through taking images of oneself, that is then distribute online, and self-gazing in digital technology such as a phone screen. It becomes an alter ego that exists solely on a virtual degree. The virtual doppelgänger is digital copy of oneself, it is solely a virtual representation and a digital likeness of our present-day self, that exists uniquely in that forum, creating the subtle distinction between how a traditional doppelgänger is defined. Due to the acknowledgement our virtual doppelgänger to label the digitally existing copy of ourselves, could this potentially lead to an interior investigation in which we feel dissociative with our digital duplicate? Khanchandani states that "there is a disconnect when we see another human without experiencing the more visceral connection offered by eye contact, smell, warmth and touch." (Khanchandani, 2021). As the virtual doppelgänger is not

physical matter, we cannot encounter though sensory experiences such as touch and sound there is a disconnect between the original and their virtual doppelgänger. This distinction is further supported when the virtual doppelgänger has received enhancement or alterations. By experiencing other people's virtual doppelgängers that have undergone manipulation, could this consequently lead to feelings of dysphoria? This premise I will further explore through case studies such as Laura Pannack, and the *Euphoria and Dysphoria* chapter, the way in which the existence of virtual doppelgängers can adversely affect their producers and the existing original. Such as examining if low self-esteem and dysphoric sentiments towards oneself correlate as an outcome of self-investigating that may arise during self-taking acts. Which ultimately can further demonstrate the problematic and darker aspects of selfie-culture.

1.4 Secondary Theories

This subchapter is an overview of secondary research I will be using throughout my thesis. The first three subchapters consist of my primary research, which analyses the core theories (such as the doppelgänger) that I use. Additionally, they establish my terminology and research foundation for the rest of my thesis. However, these theories are used to synthesis my ideas and did not require the same level of depth or analysis.

B.F. Skinner – Operant conditioning

In 1937 psychologist Burrhus Frederic Skinner coined the term operant conditioning in the field of reflex physiology (Staddon, J & Cerutti, D, 2003). Skinner's theory developed from Thorndike's "law of effect" which stated, "that a behavior that is followed by pleasant or desirable consequences is likely to be repeated, while behavior that is followed by undesirable consequences is less likely to be repeated" (McLeod, 2018). Leading to theorization of positive reinforcement. Positive reinforcement refers to the introduction of a desirable or pleasant stimulus after a behavior. The desirable stimulus reinforces the behavior, due to the joy received, making it more likely that the behavior will reoccur. (Ackerman, 2021). Through positive reinforcement a response or behaviour is strengthened by a positive reception, this rewarding sensation encourages and strengthens repetition of the rewarded behaviour. Reward is the reinforcing stimulus that motivates a person to continue displaying the urged behaviour. Overall meaning that through operant conditioning behaviour that is reinforced through reward is statistically likelier to be repeated, and behaviour unrewarded or punished will occur less frequently. Throughout my research I will be using the theory of operant conditioning to utilize and understand why and what justifies or motivates people to selfie take and distribute.

Edward Thorndike - The Halo Effect

In 1920 American psychologist Edward Thorndike recognized the halo effect in his article, *A Constant Error in Psychological Ratings* (Perera, 2021). The halo effect is defined as a cognitive bias which influences how we judge a person's character. Where your overall impression of a person impacts the evaluation you have of that individual, down to that person's specific traits. By assuming a single trait, it can develop into an overall assumed perception we then hold that person to. Additionally, the halo effect is often rendered to be the "physical attractiveness stereotype" and the association that "what is beautiful is also good" principle (Cherry, 2020). To further clarify the halo effect is classified as a cognitive bias due to the fact its causation is a perception error that distorts the way a person perceives someone else, and in some instances themselves (McCornack, S. & Ortiz, J, 2016). I will be using the halo effect in association to social media and in chapter 3 subchapters 2 and 3 to discuss how there is social recognition and reward for correctly done femininity or social compliance. Additionally, due to celebrity or social station some are allowed to breach Instagram community guidelines and do not get reprimanded.

Chapter 2

2.1 Laura Pannack – *Digital Self-Esteem*

Throughout this chapter I will use photographers as case studies to discuss about the core ideas discussed in chapter 1. Such as the concepts of self-surveillance, virtual doppelgänger and the occurrence of narcissism and see how they transpire in visual practise. It seemed natural to use Laura Pannack series *Digital Self-Esteem* as she explores the theme of self-surveillance in adolescents. Especially when her series raises queries into how selfie culture and adolescent self-surveillance and the way it is impacting their psychology, which then would plausibly effect sociological behaviours. Even though Pannack uses analogue photographing technology and not digital, the methodology and theory behind her series aids in identifying the relationship between self-surveillance and the result it can have. Equally so, can be applied to digital culture.

Pannack proposes the query “will the next generation begin to feel like they are a ‘disappointment’ or inadequate version of their edited digital persona and why?” (Pannack, 2017). This initial question proposed by Pannack, can be applied to the notion of the virtual doppelgänger. Will the next generation, destined to have further advanced technology and social media usage, feel insufficient in comparison to how they perceive their virtual double and online persona? It is beneficial to try understanding what may encourage insecurity to develop, and what factors may possibly nourish the feeling of inadequacy in adolescents using social media. This would aid in understanding why majority of Western society engage in selfie taking behaviour and distribution.

Immediate gratification naturally encourages people to partake in taking selfies and sharing them online. In this instance, instant satisfaction and the sense of feeling rewarded derives from ‘likes.’ ‘Likes’ and ‘comments’ allow users to acknowledge that you appreciate their photo and

are universally used due on all social media platforms. The photo sharer is alerted when an individual interacts with or “like” their photo, which is where the instant validation and the euphoric feeling arises from. Evan Asano explains how “Likes have been the standard of measurement up until now” (Asano, 2019). Meaning that social media users, apply the positive feeling derived from this public appreciation and direct this as a measurement for self-worth, attractiveness, and value. The higher number of “likes” received is more validating this is. Whereas less “likes” received can lead to feelings of insufficiency, and this critical self-surveying can therefore negatively impact self-esteem. Which understandably keeps people taking and reposting selfies as it is easy to chase and receive social validation this way.



Blonde Arms Folded (Pannack, 2017)

Pannack's series *Digital Self Esteem* intimately explores her subject's relationship with their appearances. The series raises interesting perspectives into the development of self-worth in the age of technology, which exists as a new generational phenomenon with Instagram alone having 1 billion active account holders (Dean, 2021). Pannack's subject's range in age, from 7 – 17, which seats them at an impressionable age, where their identity is budding, and social factors can influence them. Pannack's methodology in this series involved a two-way mirror, where Pannack and the camera were placed behind the mirror and looking through at the subject while taking their portrait. The subjects could not see the camera nor Pannack but were stood facing their own reflection. In an interview for *Jungle* magazine Pannack describes that "It's unusual to capture someone who is aware they are being photographed but can't see you; they can see themselves" (Cury, 2017). The boundaries between subject and viewer are intentionally shifted, the segregation of the subject and Pannack's as the photographer creates an exceedingly intimate viewing experience for the viewer and the subject. The choice of using a two-way mirror actively encouraged a dissociation of the environment and subject's surroundings to meticulously focus solely on their reflection.

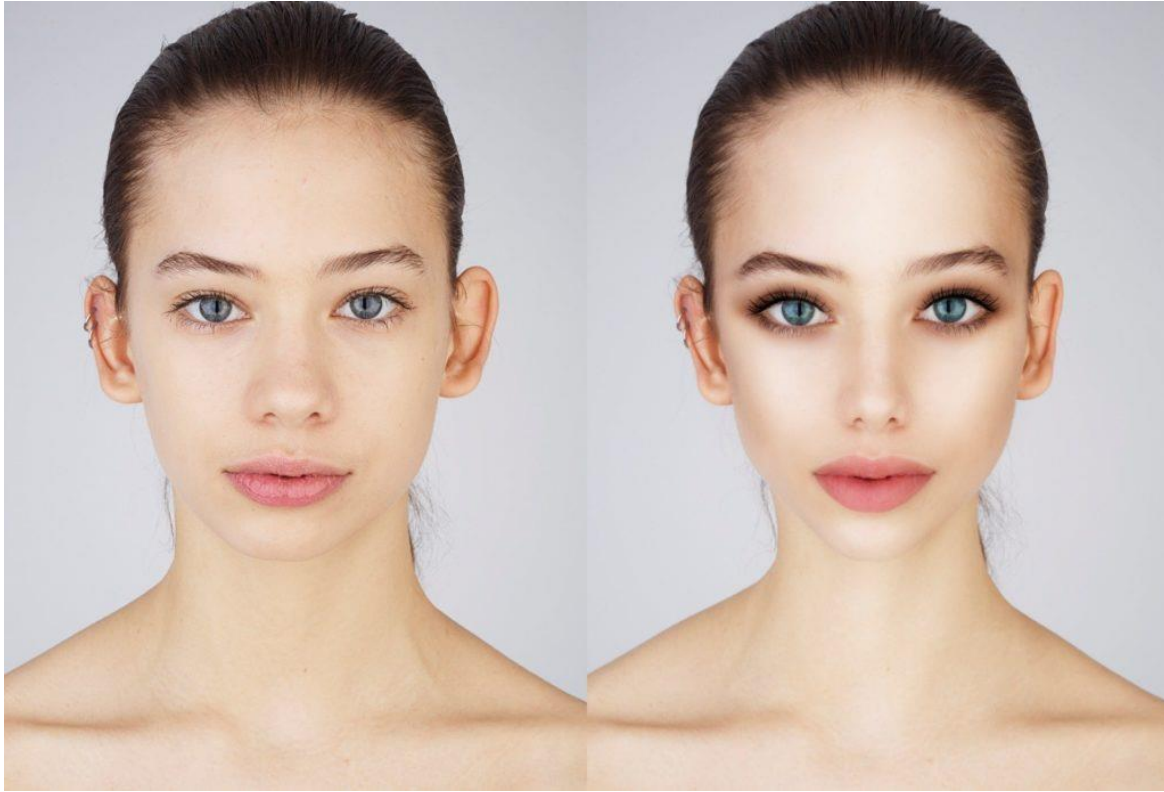
Regarding Figure 4 we can already begin to see that the result of this encounter. The outcome subtly shows the subject's internalized feelings relating to their self and the self-surveying they are instructed by Pannack to do. The outcome of this act creates a series of portraits that expose an intimate yet revealing gaze which is arguably present yet absent. The penetrating gaze of the subjects seems as though it is trying to cut through the materiality of the image and implant itself in the viewer, which creates a vulnerable and emotive aura. Similarly, to arguments raised in chapter 1 regarding the perception Narcissus did not recognise his reflection as being himself but recognised it as an other. This can be applied to Pannack's subjects and question the subject's

relationship with their exterior environment and whether they felt detached as they self-surveillance. Due to the usage of a mirror in this series the subjects can actively self-surveillance as Pannack takes their portrait. Pannack series was created with the assumption that the subject's all have developed a cognitive awareness of their self, and unlike Narcissus not being able to recognise his reflections it can be assumed that the subjects are aware they are self-gazing. To reiterate Foucault's statement, the subject's gaze is alert throughout the process. Stressing the notion of self-surveillance that the subjects had the mental consciousness that they were being observed. This in turn could influence how the subject's felt when they had their autonomy removed, and placed the control in Pannack's hands, removing the ability to self-curate.

In addition to this, it would be interesting to understand and question how they feel towards their reflection. When we begin to manipulate our self-portraits, it can be easy to feel less important than our (what we may deem as improved) pictures and online portrayal of ourselves. A correlation arises here, one between the real and the other. As described prior, the virtual doppelgänger is our digital other, and this can often be an enhanced and intricately curated faultless persona of ourselves. Pannack explores the theme of adolescents feeling inadequate to their digital selves due to their generation being surrounded by the normalisation and advancement of technology and social media in their day-to-day life. Thus, I am drawing from this premise and am interrogating *why* someone can feel unsatisfactory in comparison to their virtual doppelgänger. The virtual doppelgänger directly receiving the positive affirmation, almost encourages the behaviour through positive reinforcement. When we continually see ourselves through this filtered likeness of ourselves (especially one we are presenting to be authentic to ourselves) it can make it harder to accept normal physical features people may deem as flaws, such as blemishes as it now takes

seconds to remove. This routine of “flaw” removal can certainly lead to dissatisfaction and negative feelings being projected onto our actual appearances.

Pannack shoots *Digital Self-Esteem* in analogue, with no editing or retouching; she explains that she wanted the portraits to be “pure”. Typically, selfies will undergo some alterations in the post-production and editing phase before they are posted online. According to RETOUCHME (RETOUCHME, 2020) some of the most predominant facial alterations include removing acne, moles, and wrinkles, airbrush the skin and thinning the face. Pannack’s series exists as a stark contrast to selfie or self-portraits we frequently see in our day-to-day life. Selfies can now easily undergo drastic but natural looking manipulation, so much so they go unnoticed by the common eye. Pannack’s portraits are devoid of striving to appear perfect or adhere to any pre-meditated beauty standards selfie takers may struggle to try achieving. The motivation for taking these portraits is not to gain fleeting gratification through likes on social media. It strives to show a pure representation of the subjects while acknowledging the way in which the silent, yet prevailing pressure of perfection affects adolescent’s identity, self-esteem, and relationship with their self-value.



Rankin, Eve, 18 (Rankin, 2019)

Figure 5 is an image from Rankin's *Selfie Harm* (Rankin, 2019) series. *Selfie Harm* features a collection of fifteen teenagers, and after taking their portrait Rankin asked them to edit their portrait and make it more social-media friendly. The results are shocking as the hyper-retouched and cartoonish portraits emerged, showcasing an extreme example of what adolescent girls are deeming as desirable or correct. In an interview with Sarah Cascone for Artnet News Rankin comments how "It's time to acknowledge the damaging effects that social media has on people's self-image." (Cascone, 2016). When mutually observed with Pannack's *Digital Self-Esteem* series it is clear to see the correlation that the feelings that adolescent inadequacy can bring.

Soraya Mehdizadeh in a study into self-esteem and narcissism on Facebook found that individuals with low self-esteem engaged in more self-promoting behaviours on Facebook than did individuals with higher self-esteem. Additionally, women categorized as having low self-esteem were found to post more self-promoting photos online, than did women with higher self-esteem (Mehdizadeh, 2010). Mehdizadeh's study supports the notion that people who engage in selfie taking and sharing, does not equate to narcissism, showing that in fact, it is the reverse. There is no denying that there is a basis to assume that selfies are motivated with narcissistic tendencies, and that there are individuals that would qualify as sharing selfies for grandiose reception. Yet, when further analysing it is the lack of narcissism, and insecurity that is motivating young people to take, edit and share their selfies as an act of encouragement and reassurance their appearance is valid.

In Brennon Wood's Journal, *The British Journal of Sociology* (Wood, 1998), there is reference to Stuart Hall. Hall states that "Identity is formed in the interaction between self and society." (Hall, 1996). We can use this to further explain the relationship between the negative effects of seeing people's exaggerated and edited images can cause. This suggests that social factors we are exposed to actively impact how we can view ourselves and therefore how we might present ourselves to society, by means of virtual curating and presentation. Furthermore, adolescents may begin to mould their appearance and personality to suit an image of a person that does not exist, their virtual doppelgänger. Resembling them in likeness and interest, but this is a separate and deliberately crafted persona of themselves – an alternate identity. Due to the convenience to update, curate and change your online persona, and the ease of receiving appreciation for this behaviour (through positive reinforcement) acknowledged from likes, it motivates the cycle of this behaviour to continue. This double of ourselves can be edited in post-

production process, blemish removal, filters, colour correctors, facial manipulation, meaning that we can recognise this copy or representation as being another version of our reality self. As referenced prior, the ease of photo manipulation paired with the ability to curate imagery, leads to a precisely crafted narrative of ourselves, this is where the virtual doppelgänger arises from. We can distinguish this as an other of ourselves due to the likeness it resembles but the alterations made allow for a distinction to develop, where we can perceive it as being a comparable representation of the truth. As selfie taking behaviour and sharing is socially normalised, encouraged and arguably expected, to what extent does this begin to reap negative consequences to the individuals participating in this act? When we acknowledge the legitimacy of the virtual doppelgänger, one that becomes a filtered, and positive representation of our life, personality, and appearance we may begin to compare ourselves to this virtual version of ourselves.

When we theoretically begin to compare our reality self to our virtual doppelgänger this can consequently lead to dysmorphic feelings surrounding one's appearance, life, or personality. Leading to feelings where we may begin to view ourselves as a less adequate version of the perfected double we have created to be spectated online. The validation received through likes these selfies can receive, can further encourage this behaviour through positive reinforcement. The optimistic feeling derived from the likes received, acts as positive reinforcement, and encourages this to continue to obtain this external validation. This would be applicable to selfie takers that actively share their selfies on social media, which allow for receptive interactions. Leaving it unapplicable to those who do not share their selfies, but merely take them for their own self viewing. For those who do share them, it then in turn creates a vicious cycle of being stuck trying to adhere to the pressure to present yourself as the most perfected and positive version of yourself. This is due to that specific presentation that is the source of the validation being received. Leaving

the selfie takers continually nourishing their virtual doppelgängers to receive positive reinforcement.

2.2 Ryan McGinley – *Mirror Mirror*

Ryan McGinley's series *Mirror Mirror* facilitates an examination into self-surveillance in a personal environment through Goffman's Front Stage, Backstage theory and how this can influence the image takers behaviours and self-representing. Additionally, other questions we can begin to explore is the potential ways in which technology can have narcissistic connotations, and how this technology can affect how one may read an image. The *Mirror Mirror* project is populated by McGinley's inner circle featuring who he deems as his community. Including family, college friends, moms, aunts, ex-boyfriends, and previous models. All come from a variety of backgrounds and occupations, varying from actors, architects, dancers, performers, and photographers. Creating an incredibly diverse set of subjects.

McGinley explains that "Rather than shoot them as I have before, I asked them to photograph themselves in their own spaces using a set of written instructions I devised to help guide the process." (McGinley, 2018). The environmental factor of this series is important to note and draws out interesting conclusions as to how people may interact and perform differently for the camera while in a personal space, a space which makes them feel at ease. Therefore, this allows conclusions to be drawn as to why selfies may occur more in one's home or personal environment. A person's living space is a richly complex environment, by looking into how one's possessions, décor, and space we can extract information regarding someone's interior life. For this series McGinley's assistants sent fifteen door-sized mirrors to the subjects' homes with instructions to be read and interpreted. With the instructions provided the subjects were left to their own devices to decipher and fashion their own interpretations to how they choose to photograph their selves. In figure 6 McGinley comments about how in the instructions he left for the participants that "The

variation of images and instruction interpretation that comes from using mirrors within an extremely confined space. The multiple reflective surfaces generated unpredictable angles and made things look trippy and psychedelic.” (McGinley, 2018). McGinley left multiple instructions after a film roll had been used, and further encouraged more self-experimentation and allowed for more participant creative liberty. This experiment yielded images which were intimate in nature and psychologically revealing portraits.

RYAN MCGINLEY: 'MIRROR MIRROR'

SET-UP

The artist, Ryan McGinley, is not present during the taking of any of these photographs.

Photos are suggested to be shot with a Yashica T4 Superscope Camera (although any point & shoot film camera can be used to complete this project, disposable cameras are welcome as well) Make sure the flash is off.

Required: 5 rolls of 35mm Color film, 36 exposures, 400 or 800 speed. The photographs are shot on film so the subject cannot see the results as they are shooting.

Suggested 15-20 door-sized mirrors (Or gather 15 mirrors of different sizes) Duct Tape the back of each with an 'X.' Wrap them in blankets during transportation. Clean all your mirrors prior to shooting.

If you're a couple (or a group) please take turns shooting each roll.

Do not clean your apartment before the shoot.

Play music. Turn on your favorite album or mix for the entire shoot.

Safely prop all the mirrors around your room. They should go vertical and horizontal. Propped against beds, walls, couches, chairs, and on the floor.

Turn on all lights in your room, bring in extra lights if it's too dark.

If you choose to create more privacy, block the windows with plants or cover them with light sheets.

You can shoot both vertical and horizontal (not diagonal).

Instructions can be followed alone or read aloud by a partner to help guide your process.

The project in total should take 1 hour to complete by an adult. Photographs must be shot in the nude.

Figure 6 depicts the instructions McGinley left for his subjects to follow. Instructing his participants to point and shoot camera, which infer the resemblances regarding the nature of point and shoot technology. Iphone and selfie technology, much like the Yashica T4, it is compact in size, its small and convenient size allows for easy portability. The ability to transport freely around your photographic technology allows for any opportunity to easily capture images. In addition, this pairs neatly with the automatic functions, which takes away the manual and technique a DSLR would require. Peraica describes how we can “disappear in the wake of the plethora of do-it-yourself (DIY) photographic practise.” (Peraica, 2017). The fluidity and ease, means that taking portraits is an effortless act that anyone can do. Minimal to no guidance, technique and practise is required. Often leading to the criticism that selfies are considered fleeting and without skill. The easy creation and capture of selfies enable any willing individual to explore their self whether it be in their front stage or backstage environment.

In the case of *Mirror Mirror* the straightforward technology provided, meant more focus could be placed on creativity, self-exploration and the self-surveillance the participants were asked to do. An example in the way McGinley probes into the relationship between the self and the external reality (the individuals living environment) and to understand the subject’s cognition, is by instructing them not to tidy their environment before partaking (as shown in figure 7). An example of understanding one’s environmental psychology can be shown in figure 7, as shown on the next page.



Untitled (McGinley, 2018)

As shown in figure 7 an understanding about the individual can be crafted. Presumably from the graffiti covered walls this subject likes to engage in art as a form of self-expression, but in a freestyle and less conventional way than perhaps exhibiting art. The propped-up skateboards in the far-right corner nods to a hobby and a culture they might be involved within. Their environment is a projection of their inner pleasures and interests. When taking this premise and develop it further while including the idea of the virtual doppelgänger, if someone begins to curate and share these portraits in an online forum such as Instagram, selfie consumers and social-media users begin to paint a picture of the individual. Additionally, with this premise in mind there can be deliberate choices, censoring or oversharing for others to interpret. To be meticulous in the way people will interpret their virtual doppelgänger. Meaning others are fed imagery that builds a narrative of oneself in their head, this can be manipulated or performed if one so desired. But self-imagery that is taken beyond the composition of face and torso, begin to provide information about its taker. Therefore, if someone desires, their virtual doppelgänger can be a close resemblance and representation of their true experience and genuine self, or it can be completely fabricated or a muted version of their reality.

Goffman began to explore the impact of environment, group relations and interactive meanings to develop a deeper understanding of individual identity. His approach provided an insight into the nature of social interaction and the psychology of the individual. Despite the limitation of Goffman's work being written prior to the colossal advancement in technology and the media of photography, we can still draw from and apply the foundations of his theory to the present day. Goffman employs a "dramaturgical approach" in his study into individual identity. Goffman's approach investigates the mode of presentation individuals are exposed to and how this impacts their broader social context. The theory proposes that we as individuals are performing,

and we involuntarily partake in what Goffman describes as front stage and backstage personas. To aid in establishing our social identity the notion of “front” describes the daily performance which exists outside of our private and personal space, it exists in the exterior domain. For example, part of a university student’s front stage environment would be their classroom, library and campus. It is suggested that when we are in our front stage space, we are putting our best self forward. The persona to be liked and respected by those also interacting and occupying our front stage spaces. Where we might conform and adhere to behaviours deemed as socially accepted. Backstage is the relaxation away from our front stage persona, free from judgement and having the comfortability to do and exist as we please; the lesser known and presented identity. This is traditionally considered to be your home environment, more specifically a bedroom as this is a personal and private space (Goffman, 1959). The theory does not suggest we have two completely different identities in each stage. More so that we have more caution and awareness of our surroundings and social acceptance when we are in our front stage, and we do not tend to have these worries in our back stages.

This determines that the *Mirror Mirror* series was conducted in the participants backstage environment. This give us as viewers an insight into the actions that the participants engaged in when there was no audience present. Front stage, backstage theory suggests that a person's identity is a psychological entity that is continually influenced by interactions with others. Arguably it could be inferred that the subjects in McGinley’s series have had their front stage and backstage environments blended and are therefore presenting their front stage personality. Signifying that the subjects involved have the awareness as part of their self-surveillance and are conscious they might be viewed by others, and therefore hold back or censor their true persona. However, with the portraits being taken in the participants backstage environment, this relaxed and comforting setting

can allow for vulnerable expressions to arise. Goffman refers to “breaking character” where someone’s backstage performance is intruded by someone not meant to see it (Goffman, 1959). Thus, suggesting that structure of McGinley’s instructions and practise in the *Mirror Mirror* series are not an accurate portrayal of his subjects, as they feature “broken” characters. Furthermore, the backstage setting exists as a comforting space, in this instance for the participants to feel safe or secure enough to perform and visually experiment.

When considering the social media profile to be one’s front stage personality, and the backstage personality being a personal environment in which someone takes a selfie, correlations can form between Goffman’s theory and selfie culture. Typically, as we saw in preceding writing, social media acts as a vessel for us to present the best versions of ourselves, for validation and social acceptance much like we would in our front stages. Therefore, our social media front stage becomes the realm in which our virtual doppelgänger performs on and becomes back of the act. As it is done by so many people it becomes a part of our social identity and therefore influence our cognitive development. As mentioned prior, McGinley comments about how he considers a person’s living environment to be a rich complex space, and that they are telling one an individual’s interior world. (McGinley, 2018). The notion of a backstage personality enforces that and would aid McGinley in achieving the images he does. By choosing to conduct the experiment in the participant’s environment he provides them with the luxury of familiarity and subconscious relaxation which would aid them to experiment more comfortably than if they were in their Front stages. Despite, the arguments the subjects are breaking characters this can additionally be applied to anyone taking a selfie in their backstage environment. There is a break in one’s backstage personality when taking a selfie intended to be viewed as one’s frontstage persona. Adam Barnhart comments how the “individual actor feels a strong pressure to conform to the desired front in the

presence of an audience, as deviance destroys the credibility of the entire performance” (Barnhart, 2018). Barnhart’s statement can directly be applied to the realm of social media. How people want their virtual doppelgänger to accurately reflect their front stage persona, which then in turn affects their self-surveillance. By means of a conscious consideration into the selfies they are taking and sharing in the digital realm. It becomes another forum to perform and feed their frontstage personality.

Chapter 3

3.1 *Pics or It Didn't Happen*

Pics or it Didn't Happen is a book authored as a collaborative project between Avida Byström and Molly Soda. As described by the artists the book itself began as a kind of “symbolic graveyard” and exists as a “ceremony for the lost photos.” (Byström, A. Soda, M, 2016). Interestingly in the book *Camera Lucida* written by Roland Barthes, in his judgment he explains how no matter if the body is dead or alive, according to photography it is almost automatically dead. Barthes’ concept ties subtly to the way in which the authors describe their book as being a ceremony for the removed selfies and that *Pics or It Didn't Happen* is a metaphorical graveyard. This concept stems from early Victorian mortuary portraits of photographing the recently deceased. Barthes’ discusses the notion that the memory of the moment captured has already passed (Barthes, 1981). The premise of the *Pics or It Didn't Happen* was to collect images that had been deleted from Instagram for breaching community guidelines, physically immortalizing them. Similarly, to mortuary portraits, they will exist physically and virtually beyond their takers and sitters. These images originally removed with the intention to be forgotten and unseen, suddenly become memorialized forever in a different form, the figurative *Pics or It Didn't Happen* cemetery. Further instilling the premise that an image can forever live on the internet and outlive us.

The phrase itself “pics or it didn't happen” infers that if you did not capture a moment, immortalizing it and then share it on a social media platform, how do we as visual consumers know it happened? There is an increased habit forming in our social visual culture, where as a society we are actively take images solely motivated by the notion that we intend to share it online. Further explained by Erin Ratelle how this behavior is rooted “on the notion that media is integral to being

or existence” (Ratelle, 2019). Additionally, this can also suitably be paired with Peraica’s notion in *Culture of Selfies* that selfie takers can have the “anxiety of falling into amnesia.” (Peraica, 2017). Explaining how the enthusiasm and desire to capture a memory is to ensure we do not forget it in months or years to come. Therefore, manifests the worry that if we did not record, it did not happen and/or the fear of forgetting it happened. John Berger in his book *Understanding a Photograph* explains how “photographs bear witness to a human choice being exercised in a given situation” and additionally how this recording enforces that “this particular event or this particular object has been seen.” (Berger, 2013). Explaining that photographs are evidence of human cognition in action, and visually documenting our lives for other to consume. Thus, selfies can aid in identifying emerging patterns of human behaviour, cognition and motivations.

Sarah T. Roberts in *Pics or It Didn’t Happen* shares the statistics that over 95 million photos are uploaded to or shared via Instagram every day, with 500 million users worldwide, all achieved within less than six years of existence (Roberts, 2016). Showing the rapid rise in our society and everyday usage we have seen social media have, aided by the technology that enables it to happen i.e., the front facing camera. The structure of social media means that by posting selfies we can record ourselves to prove our existence on a timeline. Not necessarily a linear timeline, as we control when we post images and in what order, which can jolt the authentic timeline in which they were taken. Subsequently, meaning we create our own virtual timeline of events. This overall guarantees an individual’s existence in time and space, recording and documenting what events may be occurring in their life, ensuring the individual’s permanent existence on a virtual timeline and public platform. Further demonstrating how the intricate design of social media encourages selfie taking behavior.

Pics or it Didn't Happen highlights the types of selfies and potentially lewd images that are routinely removed as part of 'content moderation.' Due to the collection of images featured a pattern begins to form about the types of images that are more subjected to censorship. Authors Byström and Soda express that "our choice to archive these 'removed' images in a book parallels the elevation that happens when something is censored" (Bystrom, A. Soda, M, 2016). To initially categorize some of these images that are rigorously removed include photographs of genitalia, bare butts, female nipples, period stains, liquid resembling semen or vaginal secretion and pubic hair. Roberts further remarks that for censorship to occur there needs to be rules which govern user entertainment and distribution. Additionally, that Instagram requires a "worldwide legion of what I call commercial content moderation (CCM) workers" who use their own taste, social norms and sensibilities to make a decision if content should be removed or not. (Roberts, 2016).

The nature of Instagram's guidelines often allows us to ponder what it is about the images featured in this book that may specifically be violating Instagram's terms and conditions, and what is able to pass by these restrictions. Selfies are heavily viewed synonymously with Instagram, which almost acts as the mothership for selfies. Relying heavily on the willing participation of its user base to continue to persistently upload images, continuing the cycle of users and uploaders returning to refresh and scroll. Digital media is repeatedly disparaged as producing fast content intended to be short-lived, by taking the time to edit and physically printing these censored images it allows them to take up space and carry weight. Often leading selfies to be regarded in the same light. Peraica describes how "Selfies are ephemeral and non-important. They report on arbitrary moments/events appear important as any other day" (Peraica, 2017). In Peraica's opinion selfies are brief by nature and do not provide any meaningful value, but rather exist as visual notes of

events or instances that occur throughout the day. With selfies being characterized as trivial, as at times they can be, it is interesting to begin to assess the types of content moderation that arises.

Journalist Lacey-Jade Christie reports how “the Instagram algorithm favours thin, white, cis gendered people and effectively censors the rest of us” (Christie, 2020). Stressing the double standard that occurs on Instagram regarding different types of female bodies. This raises the question of what is the harm or damage that can be inflicted by individuals seeing content that Instagram deem unfitting for a public forum? Nude female bodies are obviously not inherently dangerous but have always and continue to be controlled and sexualized, and expectedly social media would be no different. But why are some female bodies or experiences removed and others not? What is the criteria of appropriateness? Naturally the argument arises that it should not be one rule for certain types of women, and another for the rest. Unquestionably Instagram needs a guideline of community suitability and user welfare, censoring unsafe subject matter, especially for minors. That being said, it becomes more apparent that there needs to be a reform in the way in which certain content is policed.

Many of the images featured in *Pics or It Didn't* happen are selfies which are taken in intimate personal setting such as bedrooms and bathrooms, which we can assume is the subject's backstage environment. The relaxation one's backstage environment is alluded to bring, creates insignificant but truthful recordings of the trivial moments in the taker's day or life. This can give the selfie taker a sense of ease and comfortability to visually explore their body and entertain their self by performing for the camera. These types of pictures back the viewpoint that these types of selfies are void and narrative less on a surface level, as they do not seek to provoke a conversation, but just to be witnessed (as they have been shared). It is the sharing of selfies that generate the belief they are only created and shared to fulfill narcissistic tendencies of the taker. Reinforcing

the stigma that selfies are simply created and shared for the taker to then be the recipient of a self-stimulating feeling.



Untitled (@_carlornd_ , n.d.)

Figure 8 is a selfie produced by @_carlornd_ (Instagram handle) and exhibits some of the subjects discussed. At first glance it is evident that the reason for the selfie's removal is the exposed nipple. Instagram's community guidelines explicitly state their stance on nudity, plainly stating how:

It also includes some photos of female nipples, but photos in the context of breastfeeding, birth giving and after-birth moments, health-related situations (for example, post-mastectomy, breast cancer awareness or gender confirmation surgery) or an act of protest are allowed. Nudity in photos of paintings and sculptures is OK, too. (Instagram, 2021).

Interestingly there is no overt statement regarding male nipples. So, from this specification concerning female nipples, we can assume that if this same selfie was taken by a male with their nipple exposed the image would not qualify as breaching Instagram's guidelines. Further supporting the critiques that Instagram has double standards for content moderating. It is fair to assume that the incentive to moderate female nipples online stems from subliminal sexualization of female breasts. The gendered differentiation between what Instagram's community guidelines deems appropriate on bodies rings clear throughout *Pics or It Didn't Happen*. The motivation for a female nipple being revealed must either serve a purpose, as displayed through an act of protest, medically led or artistic by means in paintings and sculptures. The female nipple just simply existing in its natural presence is reason for removal and censorship by Instagram's standards. There was significantly less males featured in *Pics or It Didn't Happen* but the selfies featured were arguably much more graphic and erotic in their nature. Suggesting that male selfie and images must be considerably more scandalous or provocative to be indicted the way their counterparts are. Even though selfies may inherently be unmeaningful the way we regard them and the way they

live online provokes sociological discussions about our society and how there are gendered policies for regulations.

Establishing an opinion on selfies is easily developed as they occur commonly in our society. With varying opinions that if we follow the attitude selfies are in fact pointless in their existence, figure 8 fits the narrative that selfies exist as banal. That selfies are primarily visual and self-imaging technology easily facilitates for ordinary moments to be captured. Alicia Eler in her book *The Selfie Generation* describes how the nature of selfies is that they are “shot with the awareness of *potential publicness* even if it is saved to a phone and never shared or leaked.” (Eler, 2017). This implies that selfie behaviour and intentions can distort our notion of what ought to be public and private, seamlessly blending the two and creating a new virtual existence. This facilitates the idea of the virtual doppelgänger, which can inhabit a fictional virtual likeness of ourselves but presents a genuine reveal into our public or private moments.

Perhaps for many individuals the very existence of selfie technology, such as our mobile devices with built in selfie-enabling features such as the front facing camera, necessitates living in both physical and virtual spaces. Examining the psychology behind Figure 8 and aiming to examine as to why the individual chose to share the image it would be valuable to try understanding her thought path. Taking the selfie at face value it can be instinctively assume that she had the photographing technology already in her hand and took a quick selfie in the mirror reflection in a short-lived moment. The way this selfie reads is that it was a momentary instant in which the individual chose to capture visually and virtually, that she was already wandering around her backstage environment dressed how she felt comfortable. In this case, braless. It is the decision to share the selfie on a public forum and its removal that sparks the debate. As we know the selfie was removed for breaching the nudity regulation on Instagram, which visually is indisputable. But

there was no erotic or pornographic motivation behind the selfie, but rather a see me as I am in this moment aura. Which reads as a genuine capture of an everyday moment, as selfies typically are described to do. This suggests that the internal self-surveillance some selfie takers have is to publicly share moments in their life as they authentically occur, no matter if they are deemed as inappropriate. This maintains that certain selfies are null and void, however it is social opinions surrounding their subject matter which provokes conversations around the nature of selfies, such as gendered policies. Leading to questions such as: Are selfies really the problem, or it is it our social attitudes and internalized judgments that generate the concerns that may follow post-sharing?

3.2. Women and Selfies

The structure of social media, particularly Instagram, follows a repetitive formula. By drawing from discussions in Naomi Wolf's, *The Beauty Myth*, some of the concepts she raises can be used as an introductory tool to discuss the way we comprehend the gendered difference between men and women in society. By using theoretical concepts that came prior to digital culture and selfies it aids in understanding how images were gendered preceding to social media. This opens the discussion for the gendered differences that arise in selfie taking. I use Simone de Beauvoir's book *the Second Sex* (1949) and Wolf's *The Beauty myth* (1990) as an early foundation to understand how prior to culture how images were affecting women's cognition and how they may have chosen to photograph and present themselves. By understanding concepts of what existed before modern-day visual culture, it allows me to then use contemporary writers such as Charlotte Jansen (2017) to better articulate how female images as a capitalist and social tool have evolved.

The Beauty Myth was written in the early nineteen-eighties as an examination of how images of beauty are used against women. Drawing from capitalist assemblies that encourage female insecurity and competitiveness for financial revenue. Wolf states, while discussing women's magazines, how someone somewhere learned that women "will buy more things if they are kept in the self-hating, ever-failing, hungry and sexually insecure state of being aspiring beauties" (Wolf, 1990). The notion of the beauty myth describes the pressure and unrealistic social standards of physical beauty, which are continually perpetuated due to the commercial influences of the mass media. Petrina Hicks in an interview in *Girl on Girl* references *the Beauty Myth* by commenting on the notion of a female myth, where the images of women created by men told us visually how women should look, behave, and feel (Jansen, 2017). Leading to women representing themselves

in alignment with the perpetuated image shrouded in the male gaze. Much of feminist theory has been committed to studying and claiming that the sexual objectification of women is degrading, harmful and oppressive. Where the objectification of women regards them as being less than a full human, but rather reduces women to mere flesh. (Cahill, 2011).

As a global collective we take a staggering number of photos a year, estimated at 1.43 trillion in 2020. Even though we only share a few of those pictures taken society is using the camera very differently compared to the days of analogue technology. In a study by T.J. Thomson about selfies it was found that based on the study results, women were much more likely to take their photo or have themselves photographed. Statistically women would take selfies 8.6 times more often than men and were photographed 3.5 more times than men. Additionally, women recorded their possessions 5.4 times more than men do (T.J. Thomson, 2020). These figures indicate that there is a gendered differentiation in how men and women self-record and share selfies. Proceeding with the recognition that women partake in selfie taking more so than men do, it is constructive to evaluate how our culture is seeping into our behaviours and this new social realm. Naturally present culture will influence gendered behaviours, and with social media and selfies being a relatively new creation the way it operates is arguably different than its real-world counterparts.

Selfies in turn can create pressure and an impractical criterion of physical beauty, existing online and in person. Expanding on the notion in *The Beauty Myth* that images are used against women, and this is still prevalent and exists even now. Even though it exists differently now it survives in our culture, and this continuous perpetuation and reinforcement would naturally bleed into the virtual territory. There has always been debates amongst feminist writing whether women are empowered or undermined when they engage in sexual or casual self-representation. Selfies and social media can act as a terrain of self-exploration and power rather than simply another outlet

for conversations surrounding “body politics.” However, discussions regarding both need to be addressed as both are relevant in understanding how social media operates, and why women take selfies in the way that they do.

Writer Charlotte Jansen published a book titled *Girl on Girl* in 2017, where she discusses the female gaze alternatively to the male gaze and how it exists in art and photography. The definition of the gaze has evolved from the verb “to see” and developed from just a “look” into an “intent.” Jennifer Reinhardt explains that “the gaze can be thought of as a dynamic medium bridging the gap between art form and social theory” (Reinhardt, n.d.). This idea of intent can discuss the relationship between the gaze of the spectator versus the gaze of the individual being gazed upon, where the observer and the observed experience a ceaseless exchange. Better understanding the gaze as a theory aids in gaining an insight into the motivation of the intention of how someone wants to be gazed upon or observed when self-presenting.

There is a distinction between the male gaze and the female gaze. The male gaze theoretically precedes the female gaze, with Laura Mulvey coining the term in her 1975 essay *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*. Mulvey’s concept of the male gaze describes a heterosexual, masculine gaze, and comments women are characterised by their “to-be-looked-at-ness” within cinema and Hollywood. Further commenting how a woman is a “spectacle”, and man is “the bearer of the look” (Mulvey, 1975). The male gaze as a theory describes how a woman is positioned as an “object” that exists visually for the heterosexual male desire. Her feelings, thoughts and morals are less important or valuable than being a character for male desire. It can be argued that women present or photograph themselves in a way that appeals to the male gaze, and can externally validate them for conforming exhibiting themselves within the frame of the male gaze. Janice Loreck explains that “the ‘male gaze’ invokes the sexual politics of the gaze and suggests a

sexualised way of looking that empowers men and objectifies women.” (Loreck, 2016). Suggesting that the male gaze creates or contributes towards a gendered power imbalance. In addition, this imbalance supports a patriarchal status quo, perpetuating women’s real-life sexual objectification.

The term of the female gaze contrasts with Mulvey’s male gaze, the “female gaze” references art or visual media that subverts the ubiquitous male point of view. Ginette Vincendeau is a professor of film studies at King’s College London who in an interview for The Guardian provides her analysis on the female gaze. Vincendeau warns that it is simplistic to assume films by women will automatically be feminist, but it is a good example of “the reciprocity of the female gaze” – or how it can counter the imbalance that is thought to corrupt the male gaze. “There’s more of an equal power relation between the person depicted and the person depicting, which is to me a feminist gesture,” she says (Smith, 2020). Explaining how the female gaze and the sovereign ability to self-represent through a lens that is not motivated by the male gaze is a much more equal and fair way for women to represent their selves. The female gaze in contrast to the male gaze does not harness the same negative effects, the female gaze cannot be “like” the male gaze due to how female objectification has been implemented in human civilization for centuries, there is a historic contrast in female beauty, expected role and oppression.

Jansen describes how “there is a fundamental pleasure in looking at women that is undeniable and unavoidable and tends to complicate the central place women have in visual culture.” (Jansen, 2017). Proceeding to explain how female visibility is a fallacy, as we see photographs of women everyday but are conditioned to look at them in few specific contexts such as erotica, magazines or through the male gaze. Where the gendered expectation for women is to adhere to the male gaze, and therefore would naturally arise in selfie culture. But in the last 9 years there has been a growing number of female photographs produced by women deserves attention, and the rhetoric

of why women photographing themselves or other females through the female gaze is worthy of discussion. Image-making is now more than ever an accessible outlook for women, and it is equally female's responsibility to self-represent. Especially if the aim is to challenge the male gaze. However, some women still do (consciously or unconsciously) represent themselves through the male gaze, despite the ability for self-authorship or the opportunity to self-explore through the female gaze.

Will Storr explains how “ideas about cultural roles, institutions and values – starts to merge with our self of who we *are* and who we *should* be in society.” (Storr, 2017). Social media presents the opportunity for social comparison, as well as exposure to unrealistic beauty tropes, and body dissatisfaction is likely to result from frequent use. Comparably, to *The Beauty Myth* the cycle of encouraged self-loathing social media present innumerable idealized images of thin, lean, tone, beautiful, photo-shopped women, and the “thin ideal” and “athletic ideal” are displayed as a desirable, normal, and attainable body type for every woman (Kim & Chock, 2015). Furthermore, the internet and social media have been found to promote thinness, dieting behavior, and weight loss through idealized images of “perfect” women (Perloff, 2014).

The prospect of the “perfect” woman endlessly shifts in our preceding and present culture, keeping the cycle of trying to adhere to the existing beauty trend alive. Additionally, leaving women, who do not want to adhere to the current criteria of what is “perfect,” feeling potentially insecure. Women are left in a state of internalized self-surveillance, of how they should look or behave and are continually left struggling to display suitable feminine conformity, but to what degree? For arguably the first time in history, women have more accessibility to analyze, discuss and share hardships in place that promote harmful internalized self-surveillance. Women can now play with their identity and self-presentation through selfies. Due to the fact selfie technology

provides the ability to experiment and perform with gender identity and self-presentation in a safe, private or public way.

With the unintentional awareness that there is an unspoken, but perpetuated desire for women to exhibit feminine conformity, influenced by the male gaze, which can affect the selfies that are selected to be shared online. Another area of how women's self-surveillance has been influenced is how they examine what would be deemed an acceptable or "good" selfie. Women, in particular, have been found to upload photos to social media more frequently than do men, and tend to spend more time updating, managing, and maintaining their personal profiles (Stefanone et al, 2011). Hinting that women feel an unspoken burden to spend more time ensuring they are comfortable with the selfies they share online, and that their online presence is refined. Furthermore, signaling that women spend more time polishing and curating their virtual doppelgängers, but additionally how curating one's virtual doppelgänger is part of the self-surveillance process.

Self-surveillance occurs in three stages during selfie taking to perfect their virtual doppelgänger. The first stage being the cultural self-surveillance and internalized views of feminine conformity and what may appease the male gaze, this occurs while the selfie taker is posing for the camera, body contortion, facial expression and general performance for the front facing camera. The second stage is where the virtual doppelgänger comes into existence. Through editing, the internal process of deciding if the selfie is "good" and if it is a likeness to the representation of personality or presence the subject desires to publicly share. Leaving the third and final stage as when the selfie is distributed online, and the virtual doppelgänger exists in the virtual realm as a perfected version of the physical, real self. Furthermore, as mentioned prior images in media can be enhanced and manipulated, by using flattering lighting, photo editing programs or apps, and filters to increase the attractiveness of the women in the images (McLean

et al, 2015). Thus, when viewing other refined virtual doppelgängers in a social media forum, women are exposed to many fanciful images, which may result in heightened appearance dissatisfaction. Which in turn, can encourage women to continue in the cycle of self-surveillance, where they think how to take, edit, and present their best self for others to consume.

The cycle of consuming, sharing, and taking selfies arguably reinforces the beauty pressures that live in our culture. Erin Gloria Ryan in relation to this strain comments that “Selfies aren’t empowering; they’re a high-tech reflection of the f**ked-up way society teaches women that their most important quality is their physical attractiveness.” (Ryan, 2013). Explaining that the virtual territory is simply a digital version of our reality, and the morals, male gaze internalization and values transferred online. Thus, meaning that the beauty pressures relocated online. Ryan also continues to explain how “Young women take selfies because they don’t derive their sense of worth from themselves, they rely on others to bestow their self - worth on them – just as they’ve been taught.” (Ryan, 2013). Suggesting women, and particularly young women, may partake in selfie taking to demonstrate feminine conformity through selfies catering to the male gaze, and receive external validation for doing so through likes and admiration.

Taking and sharing selfies as mentioned prior, is free and low skilled. It is an easy and quick way for young women to receive validation. French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir’s book the *Second Sex* observes that women are complicit in their own oppression at times (In this case struggles relating to beauty standards). We have been raised and schooled to look at ourselves through a lens of how it may satisfy others and not how we ourselves might be pleased. To present oneself as passive and object-like for visual consumption. (Beauvoir, 2015). As an undergraduate I attended a lecture by Charlotte Jansen author of *Girl on Girl*, where she discussed the photography by women in the age of the female gaze. One of practitioners she used was Yvonne

Todd who commented that “There are ideas that don’t seem to shift over time. The female experience remains mired in appraisals of beauty and desirability.” (Jansen, 2018). Inferring that the female beauty battle is a cemented, but evolving experience in Western culture. This notion paired with Beauvoir’s assessment that women actively contribute to their struggle can explain why women take selfies then perfecting and modifying them. Especially with the purpose that they follow beauty norms (such as unblemished skin) and aid in perpetuating the endless cycle of struggle. By women actively sharing selfies that fit the beauty standard can urge others to follow suit and at times be more radical in their editing process, depending how far they perceive themselves from the desired image of beauty. Young adolescent women being exposed to this would naturally have an impact on their perception of beauty and their self-worth, as explored by Laura Pannack in her *Digital Self-Esteem* series. It raises questions as to how this can be tackled, to not create a generation of social media users who feel inadequate to their virtual doppelgängers.

Developing on the premise women aid in perpetuating beauty burdens, by taking and sharing images that validate the male gaze, it is reasonable to look at women which adhere to the beauty standards, create, and nourish it. As A Result, by looking at who we deem as Instagram models or influencers, such as Kim Kardashian another element in the encouragement of women taking and manipulating their selfies can be identified.



When you're like I have nothing to wear (Kardashian, 2016)

Figure 9 shows selfie *When you're like I have nothing to wear LOL* (2016) shared by Kim Kardashian in 2016. Kardashian's entirely nude selfie used black bars to censor her modesty and shared it across all her social media channels. Kardashian inadvertently began an online frenzy when she uploaded her almost naked selfie, inciting celebrity parodies to think-pieces debating whether she was a suitable role model for young feminists. In an interview with Huffington Post Kardashian responded to the critics by declaring "If you are conservative and that's how you are comfortable, more power to you. I respect you. You don't have to look at what I do." (Welsh, 2016). The self-branding that Kardashian exhibits raises the debate of what does the notion of objectifying yourself mean? Objectifying as a term has been used as a term to raise concerns over gender oppression and female depictions. In the book *Objectification* while discussing how applicable the term objectification is to Kardashian by stating "as the opposite of subjects, objects do not have the agency or the ability to control how they are seen by people." (Paasonen et al, 2021). Explaining that Kardashian monetized herself through appealing to the male gaze for financial revenue and is actively and autonomously producing these images. Therefore, how can she be objectified as the agent of her own online representation?

The premise of not wanting to see male gaze orientated imagery does raise the argument that on Instagram you can choose who to follow, you do not have to expose yourself to selfies and images that make you feel insecure. A user can cater their feed and algorithm to their personal preferences. If the individual does not want to be exposed to influencers or celebrities that photoshop and airbrush their images, then they are not required to do so. Equally so, I do believe there needs to be a level of accountability in manipulated images to be more transparent with other selfie consumers, to avoid nourishing the assumption these people naturally look like that and encouraging unattainable features.

Pics or It Didn't Happen as a case study highlighted the gendered differentiation in the way men and women were regulated and censored on social media. The book itself visually brought the contrast to light, exhibiting how women were more exhibitionist than their male counterparts. Also, how some of the selfies and images featured did not warrant their removal. *Pics or It Didn't Happen* when used in tandem with lived experience, and looking at influencers such as Kardashian, it highlights how there is an inconsistency in which types of bodies, sexual or bodily explorations, and selfies are permitted to remain in the virtual sphere. Figure 9 for example, was not removed from Instagram, but less suggestive images in *Pics or It Didn't Happen* were deleted. Initially this indicates that users of a certain class, fame or following are allowed to blur the rules of Instagram's guidelines and not face any repercussions for doing so. Whereas ordinary users with less influences and social authority in the real world are easily censored. Further signifying there is a reward for correctly done feminine conformity, women that fit the beauty ideals in the present world are permitted or more accepted in their visual expression or explorations. Whereas those who do not fit the standards are guarded and removed much more harshly. In Chapter 3, *Euphoria and Dysphoria* I will use Halo effect theory to dissect the psychology as to why there is a distinction between who is permissible to be more frivolous and relaxed with Instagram's community guidelines.

3.3 *Euphoria and Dysphoria*

There is no denying that social media in its existence is an incredibly interesting and useful tool to study human behaviour. By reviewing social media's history, it allows for an investigation into how as a tool and platform it has profoundly affected our experience of online sociality. It provides an insight into Western acceptability and cognitive process, while highlighting the complex politics of the platform. Also, offering an understanding into how active Instagram's users change their usage, and how they respond to evolving features. This subchapter explores the euphoric and dysphoric relationship that can arise with being an avid selfie taker and social media user.

In a study that examined the relationship between adolescent girls and social media Tiggemann et al commented that “Emerging evidence provides insight into the effects that social media behaviours may have on users. On one hand, social media use may be beneficial as it allows greater connectedness with others, leading to an increased sense of well-being.” (Tiggemann et al, 2010). Undeniably the infrastructure of social media has evolved since its manufacture, creating new means of socializing and creativity which now penetrates all corners of Western society. Author José Van Dijck explains how “originally, the need for *connectedness* is what drove many users to these sites” (Van Dijck, 2013). Designed with the motivation to actively encourage users to engage and connect with one another. This platform now influences human interaction on an individual basis, but also on a community level, on a much larger societal scale than ever before. Where people's profiles and algorithms allow them to become more connected to those they want to be exposed to. For example, LGBTQ+ and ethnic communities being able to follow and connect with one another, which allows individuals to harness a safe virtual space for themselves to escape

into. Allowing users to turn their social media accounts into a safe space to explore and connect with those who share similar aspects of their identity.

Social media is often thought to be a synthetic world, in which the users live consisted entirely of photogenic individuals, travel, and thriving friendships or relationships. A polished and picture-perfect reality; The virtual doppelgänger. Social media users are constantly subjected to the tension between presenting themselves in an idealized or authentic way. Erica Bailey explains that “the social nature of the platforms is thought to provide a degree of accountability that prevents individuals from starkly misrepresenting their identities” (Bailey et al, 2020). The expression that social media and selfies authorizes users to have, autonomizes how someone choses to shape how others and how their virtual doppelgänger is seen. As referenced earlier the point was raised that women in particular participate in selfie taking and editing as part of feminine conformity. This would begin to question the level of autonomy which arises in selfie culture.

Sroka and Hittmár explain that “when people have strong ties to one another their autonomy is low, whereas people with weak ties make decisions more autonomously” (Sroka and Hittmár, 2015). Indicating that those who engage more with their social media followers or community tend to be less inclined to make spontaneous decisions regarding the content they share. Whereas those who do not feel as constrained to their followers or creators that they follow are more motivated to having increased self-governing over their decisions and content. If evolving Sroka and Hittmár’s idea further and applying it to selfies, could those that take more selfies arguably exhibit less autonomy than those who do not partake as frequently in selfie taking? Readdressing Storr’s proposition about how values and cultural roles merge with our self of who we *are* and who we *should* be in society (Storr, 2017). Paired with Beauvoir’s comment about how we are “schoolled to look at ourselves through a lens of how it may satisfy others and not how we

ourselves might be pleased” (Beauvoir, 2015) can give an insight into where the arguable lack of autonomy is occurring from. Especially considering that media plays an integral role in influencing the cultural and societal pressures of our lives.

As referenced in chapter 2 *Women and Selfies* I proposed that feminine conformity was motivating women to produce selfies that adhered to beauty standards. Developing the idea of conformity in social media can in turn explain where lack of autonomy can arise whilst selfie taking. Assuming that if someone is actively conforming to socially acceptable behaviour and visuals of beauty, by posting content that is complicit with social media community guidelines, naturally the window of autonomy decreases. Seymour Epstein makes the statement that generally people intend to present “cultivate a positive self-view and to create positive impressions of themselves in others” (Epstein, 1980). Tying to the idea that on social media, user’s virtual doppelgänger resides. The virtual doppelgänger can exist as a refined version of ones living self which presents features we find socially acceptable, such as blemish free skin, and is photographed with these socially accepted nuances in mind. These nuances that selfie takers adhere to and consider in the selfie taking or sharing process, I will refer to in relation social conformity as the motivation is to be compliant with beauty specifications. We have social conformity in reality and I also referenced it in *Women and Selfies*, and it exists as a blueprint for what would be appropriate in the digital realm.

Sociologists have often used the metaphor of “the looking-glass self” to describe the process through which our perception of how others evaluate us informs our own self-image (Gecas & Schwalbe, 1983). To clarify, we use expression to elicit social feedback from others, which helps us develop our self-concepts (Markus & Wurf, 1987). Through Skinner’s notion of positive reinforcement, it indicates the positive feedback we receive helps our understanding what is well

received socially and what is not. In addition, this idea can explain how the “looking-glass self” becomes part of selfie takers self-surveillance, and this is where the removal of autonomy arises. Autonomy as a term describes the state of self-governing and having self-directing freedom. Social media and selfie taking do arguably give the ability to self-govern and represent, making choices about how to contribute or present one’s virtual doppelgänger. Equally so, as an alternative stance social media and selfies seem to have an existing blueprint of how to take, edit and share selfies on social media. Therefore, it calls into question how much self-exploration and autonomy is present if there is a significant amount of people following this blueprint? People are not forced to comply with the blueprint it but may feel obligated to do as they know this formula will align with social conformity and is encouraged through positive reinforcement.

With the aim to try construct an understanding as to what factors contribute towards this social media and selfie taking blueprint, I will use the psychological theory of the Halo effect. As described by Thomas Feeley, he clarifies that the “Halo effects lead individuals to attribute positive traits to others based upon the presence of physical attractiveness, including perceiving more attractive others as more intelligent, well adjusted, and successful” (Feeley, 2002). Hereby explaining that the Halo effect suggests as a society we would judge individuals based on their physical attractiveness, with those deemed beautiful as having positive traits like intelligence, success, and morality. Almost linking back to the Ancient Greeks with perfectionism, and how they had figures they considered to be the epitome of perfect. This aided in creating gendered beauty standards in society, for example in Ancient Greece a chiseled nude male body was regarded as perfection and shows the way that the Halo effect discreetly functioned in society. In addition to this Peterson and Palmer explain how “those in their social circles response to and treat them more warmly, leading to increased social engagement” (Peterson and

Palmer, 2017). Referencing those that are deemed greater under the pretense of the Halo effect are socially judged and treated better than those who are not regarded as conventionally attractive. From this it can be assumed that those who have a larger following, more engagement such as likes and a higher quantity of selfies posted, operate knowingly or unknowingly within the Halo effect.

For those that reap the benefits of the Halo Effect would lay out the blueprint for how the receive the same social and gratifying response. The Halo Effect operates within in world reality and has been studied in different areas of our society such as in legal proceedings or work environments, to understand social capital. Social capital as described by Margarita Poteyeva is the concept “that involves the potential of individuals to secure benefits and invent solutions to problems through membership in social networks.” (Poteyeva, 2018). As seen earlier with beauty standards, these occurrences in the physical world would naturally weave their way in the virtual sphere as they are ingrained in human behaviour. Although beauty is commonly believed to be “in the eye of the beholder” and people share common standards for specifying beauty throughout various cultures (Aronson et al. 2010). So, the blueprint theoretically already existed in the physical world and was transferred into the digital realm of social media. Now people have the accessibility to represent themselves or present their virtual doppelgänger in line with the blueprint and become recipients of the benefits of the Halo Effect.

People have the ability to piggyback or duplicate others people’s selfies or content in order to present themselves in a way they have interpreted as interesting, aesthetically pleasing or socially appropriate. Pairing with the notion that a person’s frontstage persona typically aligns with societies values that the Halo effect also contributes towards. If the vast amount of the digital population is engaging in a particular behaviour it is easy to fall into complying and participating

in the behaviour displayed. Which social media as a tool and platform does allow for. Fostering feelings of positivity by conducting oneself in a socially recognized and encouraged way. However, for those who follow the blueprints and present their virtual doppelgänger in this light but don't get the same reactions can be left feeling a sense of inadequacy. If the positive reinforcement benefits or recognition are not present (e.g. a low amount of likes) it can lead to emotions that include insecurity and disappointment. Especially for those more concerned with their followers opinions or receiving positive responses. As they forego their autonomy and present their virtual doppelgänger in accordance to the blueprint for fulfillment with the expectation that sticking to the formula would receive their intended response. For those who have more autonomy, by not being as concerned with their followers have more room and ability for expression, and social media can act as a safe space for them to self-explore. Due to the lack of pressure to conform and motivation to receive validation, these individuals have a less pressurized space to build and visually explore their identity. Which arguably would ultimately leave these users happier and more content online and in person than their less autonomous counterparts.

Conclusion

I commenced my research with the hypothesis that selfies were not strictly driven by narcissistic tendencies. In my own experience, I had often heard people labelling and reducing selfies to being superficial, self-involved, and pursuing gratification. Still, I have always observed selfies as a further representation of our cultural behaviours and social attitudes. Selfies live as visual reflections of society. Other modes of research surrounding selfies proportionately concentrate on analyzing the aesthetic of selfies, such as poses, technology and editing. Additionally, looking at the aftereffects of selfies, such as how editing selfies amplifies self-critical thinking, and how the phenomenon of selfie technology has altered how we represent ourselves. My research provides new approaches to the thinking surrounding the act of taking a selfie, focusing on the psychological and sociological motivations as to *why* selfies are being created. Also, bridging a gap in literature for terminology that describes the internal process of selfie taking and theorizes online personas. As well as concentrating on societal influences of selfie-taking motivations before a selfie is taken, while focusing on the internal thinking that occurs during taking a selfie. To reiterate, my research question stemmed from the development of two terms: self-surveillance and the virtual doppelgänger, then from examining the myth of Narcissus in an alternate way. Leading my research to investigate “To what extent do these terms exist in selfie and photographic culture, and what psychological and sociological influences do they have?”

To echo the findings from my research it was observed that by using the myth of Narcissus I was able to probe into a variety of considerations. These factors raised directly apply to selfie culture and aided in developing my terminology (*virtual doppelgänger*). An example being the notion of illusion and reality, which when cross referenced with Schalk’s idea of the binary between the *self* and the *other* provides an opening explanation. To requote Schalk, when he

commented “that the existence of an **other**, a not-**self**, allows the possibility or recognition of a **self**” (Schalk, 2011) it proposed that the presence of an other version of oneself, allows for recognizing your genuine self. This matched my initial assumption that our identity in the present world can be acknowledged as oneself, but the identity that exists virtually is a curated illusion and is presented for others to consume and interpret as one’s **reality self**. This highlights that self-imaging is monitored by the ideology of the image taker, as self-editing and ‘improvement’ can be referenced to a time preceding selfies, and back before the development of the camera. Therefore, showing that ‘editing’ is not exclusive to selfies. In addition, that online personas do not represent reality but an illusion of reality and supports the concept of the virtual doppelgänger.

By formulating an understanding of how I would regard the representation of a person that exists uniquely in the digital realm (and in social media forums) I explored the doppelgänger. Through looking at writer Dostoyevsky, and psychologists Rank and Freud, I established that the concept of the doppelgänger is defined as a double of someone that occurs in a variety of forms (e.g. mirrors reflection). I began to articulate how the idea of doppelgänger and virtual identity could coexist when discussing someone’s social media persona leading me to conceptualize the virtual doppelgänger. The virtual doppelgänger is a digitally curated illusion of one’s reality self, existing in a virtual space such as social media. It exists as a presented representation and likeness of ourselves, that reflects our life in reality but can undergo alterations that differentiate it from our real selves (body alterations, filters and use of angles). A benefit of the virtual doppelgänger is that it highlights that identity is now curatable and everchanging, while referencing the distinction between someone’s genuine self versus their digital representation. We have the ability to delete and archive selfies that can change the narrative of our virtual doppelgänger and how people would then interpret one’s life or appearance. In addition to this my research into the virtual

doppelgänger examines how experiencing one's double in a digital way can affect someone's ego and cognition. Khanchandani references Lacan's mirror stage theory and explains that our reflection can become an extension and another ego or persona of ourselves. I expanded on this idea by adapting Lacan's theory to fit contemporary society. We do not solely self-reflect in mirrors now but our reflection on a mobile screen when taking a selfie or self-gazing can qualify as a variable that impacts cognitive development. Explaining that when we self-gaze on a digital device such as a mobile we experience a virtual rendition of our genuine self. Therefore, due to the popularization of mobile technology, for an infant, seeing their reflection on a mobile could be one of their earliest encounters with their virtual doppelgänger.

When coupling the virtual doppelgänger and self-surveillance, it was suggestive that interior investigation can arise in which one can feel dissociative with their digital duplicate, depending personal ego development. Due to the proportions of the front facing camera self-takers face and upper body are fragmented, and this becomes the focus in their interior world, their gazing becomes an internalized experience which can nourish feeling of inadequacy. This was explored through Pannack's series *Digital Self Esteem*. It would have been beneficial to have found material that referenced how Pannack's subjects felt during and after the project to develop an understanding of how they genuinely felt. Initially I wanted to conduct this myself, by following Pannack's methodology of the two-way mirror to allow for self-gazing but add the feature of a cable release for the subject to hold, so they were in charge of the portraits they took. Aiming to mimic the mechanisms of a selfie, and to ask how the subjects felt during to gain qualitative data, as currently the subject's feelings are assumed. Unfortunately, due to Covid-19 lockdowns and social distancing limitations I had to shelf this idea, but it is one I would like to pursue in the future.

Self-surveillance relates to Narcissus' interior world and inner pondering. Foucault's notion that "The gaze is alert everywhere" (Foucault, 1975) developed the framework in understanding how the term self-surveillance can exist within the structure of social media. Through the conscious awareness one is being observed affects social media, leading affecting selfie takers behaviours due to the omnipresence and visibility they are aware of. This was referenced through social conformity, with the aim to take selfies that would be socially pleasing and well receiving of admiration or likes. A person's self-surveillance can be impacted when one self-gazes or takes and shares images of their self. When certain selfies receive more credibility and appraisal for having a certain aesthetic, it can encourage an individual to feel the need to perform in the same way to acquire the same level of appreciation. Encouraging an internalized self-surveillance and awareness, leading to a developed insight on how to adhere to this behavioural pattern. As referenced through the idea of operant conditioning, social conformity, and one's front and backstage personality, and how these impact our self-surveillance.

Self-surveillance aids in rationalizing why someone may partake in selfies and what their thought process may entail. Different factors can influence one's self-surveillance, such as a person's environment. McGinley's *Mirror Mirror* series provided an interesting basis to analysis how one's front stage and backstage is part of our self-surveillance. The argument can arise around the concept of 'breaking character' explaining while one is in their backstage persona, they break character by performing their front stage personality. When regarded alongside social media, one's virtual doppelgänger can be viewed as an extension of someone's front stage personality, due to selfies socially affirming quality. Supporting the premise that the virtual doppelgänger is a methodology, that allows the taker and sharer to receive approval from the audience through selfie curation. If the selfie taker has a successful reception, the intended audience will view the

doppelgänger in the way the taker intended. This creates an intimate form of communication that exists in the digital sphere, which reinforces that selfie can be taken as part of social compliancy, and the lack autonomy makes them void of narcissism. I have the interest to further study the premise of how front stage and backstage environments influence selfie taking and how people visually navigate through the two, to deeper understand the idea of breaking character. Similarly, to McGinley, it would be beneficial to conduct a visual case study and allow participants to take their own selfies and interview them after the process to gain an insight into the internal process and thinking that arises. Research on this is best done through fieldwork such as participant observation and understand its legitimacy in present day behaviour.

The case study of *Pics or it Didn't Happen* stresses the double standard that resides in Instagram's community guidelines regarding female bodies, specifically raising the concern over gendered censorship. This enhances the already raised question of what is the harm or damage that can be inflicted by individuals seeing content that Instagram deem unfitting for a public forum? Especially when seeing celebrity figures that are not punished or censored in the same way, indicating the reward for correctly done feminine conformity, alongside the presence of the Halo effect in the social media realm. Humans are social creatures, who learn through observation as referenced in Skinner's study on operant conditioning. Gendered censorship naturally would affect a woman's internalized self-surveillance, which in turn effects how they curate their virtual doppelgänger. My research presents the idea of female competitiveness as understood, through *The Beauty Myth* and the *Second Sex*, that these ideas are part of female internalized self-surveillance. That female self-surveillance is a product of social and cultural attitudes and feminine conformity can arise from the lack of autonomy in trying to adhere to the beauty standards and

social conformity. Additionally, how the “looking-glass self” becomes part of selfie takers self-surveillance, and this is where the removal of autonomy arises.

I focused mainly on women, and why they feel motivated to take selfies. While I think my research provides a fresh perspective and framework into understanding why women participate in taking selfies this left my research less understanding of male related motivations. While the theories I proposed can be applied to men such as self-surveillance and the virtual doppelgänger the understanding as to *why* is less specialized as it is with women. An example being, the historical or societal reasonings that may influence this behaviour to occur are less refined, but these terms can provide a foundation into exploring male motivations for online curatorship. Due to the distinct gendered difference between men and women regarding selfie taking it was natural to lean into gauging an understanding as to why women are more inclined to do so. If I was to pursue looking at male specific motivations in future research, I would contemplate referring back to the Narcissus myth and Ancient Greek culture, where the male form was seen as absolute perfect and looking at scopophilic themes throughout history which have led to men engaging in selfie taking the way they do.

To conclude, my thesis provides a new framework of psychologically and sociologically understanding why both men and women engage in selfie taking, through using the idea of the virtual doppelgänger. This term has longitudinal benefits and can be applied to evolving social media behaviours and Western culture. It is not rigid and can fluidly be applied to fit the current behaviours, context, and attitudes that it is referenced in. My research has a slight cultural bias to Western society, but continuing on with my research I could explore, for example, eastern social customs and how their cultural norms affect how people living in this area take and share selfies. However, I do not believe this discredits my research and framework for developing the virtual

doppelgänger and it can be employed where necessary, it is not exclusively a Western term. Finally, if I returned to this research, I would continue through using practical photographic methodologies and case studies to gain a practically applied body of work which emphasizes these terms in action. To further refine their definition and to get responses from participants that were involved and develop an impartial response to how these terms operate in a practical sense. Nevertheless, I will continue to observe from a theoretical standpoint the way in which self-surveillance and the virtual doppelgänger live in a society dominated by selfies and self-presenting behaviours. While advocating that selfies are not to be simply reduced to momentary and insignificant, but rather provide a valuable insight into our social consciousness, personal cognition, and behaviours.

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