



WITH MY SELFIE I CAN BE ME AND EVEN MORE: TOWARDS A FEMININE PHOTO-CONSTRUCTION AND PRESENTATION OF THE SELF IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Abel Akintoye AKINTUNDE

Bowen University, Iwo, Nigeria

Email: abelonhigh@gmail.com;

abel.akintunde@bowen.edu.ng

and

Ifekristi T. AYO-OBIREMI

Bowen University, Iwo, Nigeria

Email: ifeyoobi14@gmail.com

ABSTARCT

Indeed, selfie represents technological evolution in self-portraiture which embodies the flexibility underpinning advance in photography. Yet when attention shifts from selfie as technology to selfie as an interpretive construction of the self, it becomes clear that selfie is also an embodied enterprise of nuances hinged on the making, remaking and the presentation of the exorcized self in everyday life. Using Erving Goffman's approach of life as a dramaturgical stage performance of actor's before diverse audiences along with the qualitative research method predicated upon 40 In-depth Interviews, 20 Key Informant Interviews and 5 Focus Group Discussion instruments, this study identifies selfie as an enclave of four theatrical performances: aesthetic emotional construction of the self; an idealized reconstruction of the self; a communicative expression of self; and a validation-seeking presentation of the self. Ultimately, the social relations sustaining selfie as drama are rooted not in sociability but in mastery of smartphone photo-technology.

Keywords: *Selfie, Femininity, Ideal-self, Performance, Photo-constructionism*

INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of *Selfie* is one of the modern reflections of technology advance in photography but selfie has also become crucial in shaping how people creatively construct, reconstruct and even present their image of self in modern everyday life (Katrin Tiidenberg and Edgar Gomez Cruz 2015, Friedman, 2016). Selfie has become a form of intimate identification that it is now used for self-branding and self-promotion aimed at achieving an erotic encounter, identity reaffirmation, commodification, exhibition, community building, activism and "intimate" activism, among others (Begonya and Erick, 2017). The intricate intertwine of selfie with the self echoes the tenets and submissions of constructionism and interpretive sociology. Noteworthy in this regard is Erving Goffman's famous sociology of the self, detailed in his work 'Presentation of Self in Everyday Life' (1959). In this book, the construction and presentation of the self are expressed as an interpretive drama which individuals perform in the course of evolving interaction and social relations with others, which precludes those underpinning selfie (Friedman 2016, Jun, 2014 and Gergen, 2011).

Beyond the days defined by the impressions of self as presented by analogue technology in photography, we now live in digital times in which the construction and presentation of the self is governed by advanced and more flexible photo technology. It is in this light that this paper examines the self in terms of constructionism in the photo phenomenon called selfie, hence the phrase photo-construction of the self. The word selfie was first used in 2002 and in 2013, Oxford University identified it as the word of the year. They defined it as "a photograph that one has taken of oneself, typically one taken with a smartphone or webcam and shared via social media". Tiidenberg (2015, p. 2) defined selfie as "a photo a person takes of him/herself with a smart phone, a web camera or another technological device, which is often shared on SMS (social media sites)". Charis L'Pree (2015), provided a more advanced definition when she described selfie as the digital evolution of the self-portrait.

The invasion of photography by technology and its impact on the construction of the self has led to a movement from dependent to independent photography. Whereas, expert photographers played a central role in the photo-framing of the self in traditional photography,



today's photography, and particularly the selfie photography, is no longer a complex professional area of expertise but an autonomous enterprise of anyone and everyone with aptitude for modern automated technology (Castells, n.d.). Scholars have, therefore, conceptualize selfie as a practice of freedom (Tiidenberg & Gomez Cruz, 2015), which does not require complex technical and aesthetic skills (Ludders, Proitz, & Rasmussen, 2010). It is against this background that this paper examines selfie as a site for understanding the construction and presentation of the self in today's everyday life, particularly among the young. Apart from opening up an era of photography defined by automation and apart from rendering photography into an autonomous and non-specialized activity (Agrawal, 2017), the advent of selfie has also introduced flexibility to the construction and presentation of the self through photographs. Consequently, anyone, anywhere, irrespective of time, geographical location, distance and place, through the aid of mobile phone devices, can now capture static and motion image(s) of the self without restrictions (Agrawal, 2017; Katrin and Edgar 2015). Besides, photographed images taken can also be distributed not only physically to individuals in immediate environments but virtually too, to distant places by virtual means at little or at no cost at all. Biolcati and Passini (2018) found that most social network users take selfie either alone or with other people, and post them online through various SNS and freeware messaging applications. Selfie's capacity to circumvent readiness and preparedness and its symbolism of flexibility and distributiveness jointly reflect a modernity in which technology has become the centerpiece of narcissistic intercourse with oneself and of this self to others. Studies investigating the motivations behind selfie have related selfie-taking and selfie-posting to narcissism, poor self-esteem, and perception of body image (Biolcati and Passini, 2018; Diefenbach & Christoforakos, 2017; Grogan et al., 2018). The view of selfie as narcissistic self-absorption and attention seeking behaviour is particularly heightened in regards to women (Burns, 2015). Hence to the necessity to study selfie both as a photo-construction and photo-presentation of the self in everyday life.

For scholars such as Begonya and Erick (2017), selfie also represents a psychological marriage between the human body and technology. This is because selfie projects the body beyond its material limitations and wields recognition, empowerment, power, and control. Selfie is a form of self-branding and promotion connected with erotism; identity imaging embodied within intimate activism. In fact, they are not just images, although most literature on selfies center on the visual. In these studies, selfie is seen as a chain of complex addiction disorder which arises from taking so many personal photographs and posting on social networking sites for approval and comments of friends. Negative approvals thus lead to body image dissatisfaction (Shah, 2015; Duta et al, 2016; Boursier & Manna, 2018). Much more than that, selfies encapsulate images (body images), tags, hashtags, emoticons, and profiles. Consequentially, it is designed to have an effect on others. Feminine issues around women's bodies and selfies have also triggered a gendered dimension to the construction of the self in ongoing debates. Katrin and Edgar (2015), corroborate this noting that selfies provide women with an avenue to observe changes in their bodies via self-shooting. With selfie-taking and shooting, the woman has an opportunity to capture her body in a manner that shapes the understanding of how her body looks and produces for her a body that looks good. Moreso as women sometimes feel 'trapped' in what is described as 'the popularity paradox', which pressurizes them to deliver more selfies to annex their audience's expectation. One way by which selfies enhance a woman's understanding and make her body complete, according to Katrin and Edgar (2015) is by its tendency to ignite social responses such as comments and 'likes', particularly on social media. It suffices to argue, from the foregoing that selfie has evolved into a site for bodied intercourse with the self and vice versa.

Besides fostering individual understandings of body impressions, selfie has now become important to the construction and presentation of the self through the apparatuses of modern photography technology. The significance of selfie for personal and social identity construction is seen as its positive dimension (Barker & Rodriguez, 2019), prompting a focus on selfie as a means of self-reflection and self-actualization, rather than as mere instances of unbridled self-absorption (Mendelson & Papacharissi, 2010). As technology of identity construction, selfie is inextricably linked to the online environment and culture, including its pressures and

interactions. The construction and presentation of self is facilitated by the “constantly renewed communication” that online technology enables (Rocamora, 2011, p. 410). The pressure for online presence and interaction is a central part of the generative logic of selfie, because “if it is not on the web, it does not exist at all” (Stevens-Rayburn & Burton, 1998, p. 1). Within the online environment, the selfie shapes and reshapes the self as it offers the subject an opportunity to frame, define and refine the self through facial behaviours and expressions (Baker & Walsh, 2018; Walsh & Baker, 2017), fashion (Kavacki & Kraeplin, 2016) and body image production (Dutta et al., 2018).

Circulating narratives on selfie have pitched the reality within the ambience of youth and technology globalism (Coulthard and Ogden, 2018; McLean, Jarman and Rodgers, 2019), self-perception and social relationship (Katrin and Edgar, 2015), digital celebrity culture of projectionism, self-publicity and media followership (Begonya and Erick, 2017). Yet it remains unclear and nebulous how this rapidly globalizing phenomenon is also a personal experience, a gendered experience caught up within unfolding but taken-for-granted everyday verities such as people’s past, their present; their environment, their mood, their social relationships and even their values, expressed towards such a thing as an ordinary picture otherwise known as selfie. It is against this background that this study sets out to understand how selfie is both a photo-construction and presentation of the self in everyday social life.

METHODOLOGY

This paper adopts an exploratory and descriptive research design. It uses qualitative research to unravel the interpretive dynamics surrounding the feminine construction and presentation of the self using Erving Goffman’s theory of self. Adopting this micro-sociological approach requires that selfie be examined in terms of actors involved in it viz their own worlds of meanings and interpretations of that reality as Weber advocates (Coser, 1977). What is central is not the researcher’s a priori interpretation of the phenomenon but the *verstehen* – the subjective understanding and framing of this reality (selfie) from the perspective of the actor(s) involved. For as Weber (in Thompson, 2016 and Priya, n.d.) observes, to understand and fully comprehend any reality, one must penetrate into the world of meaning of the acting actors involved, what David Silverman describes as “experiencing their experience” (Thompson and Tunstall, 1976).

Hence, instruments such as In-depth Interviews (IDIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted with purposively selected undergraduate students of Bowen University Iwo, Osun state Nigeria. More specifically, data gathering was conducted in terms of the following numeric: 40 In-depth Interviews (IDIs) with female undergraduate students, 10 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with male Undergraduates and 5 Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) with Female Undergraduates. Audio recordings generated from face-to-face IDIs, KIIs and FGDs were all transcribed into qualitative texts and were subsequently subjected to interpretive and thematic content analyses. From them inductions were drawn and patterns were tracked on the interpretive links between selfie and the self along with the social relations sustaining presentation of the constructed self to ‘others’ in everyday life as discussed in latter sections of this study.

Goffman’s Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life and the Selfie Phenomenon

This paper aims to explore how the *selfie-taking* constitutes a site for the subjective construction and presentation of the self in everyday life and in the context of social interaction, particularly among female undergraduate youths. To this end, Erving Goffman’s dramaturgical approach is employed to understand how individuals especially females upload their subjective meanings and interpretations when constructing and presenting images of self through selfie using their modern gadgetry and apparatuses of digital photo-technology. Now we turn to some basic tenets of Goffman’s theory.

Goffman’s classic work on the Presentation of self in everyday life, elicits understanding on how and why people act as they do in various contexts of social interactions. He uses the imagery of the theatre as means to portray the nuances and significance of face to face social interaction. Social relation according to Goffman is a dramaturgical model of social life



consisting of people in everyday life that play underlying roles as actors on a stage. He conceptualizes this role play and the presentation of self in terms of *Performance*, *setting*, *appearance (projected social status)*, *manner (actual visible role play)*, and *stage (which comprises of the front and back dimensions)* (Marshall, 1998)

By *Performance*, Goffman describes all the activity of an individual in front of a particular set of audience and observers. Apart from consciously and unconsciously giving meanings to himself and others and their situations, the actor by means of performance delivers impressions to others which communicate information that validate the actor's identity. He identifies *setting* as that context consisting of the scenery, props and location in which the interaction takes place and as he notes different settings will have different audiences and this will require the actor to **alter** his performances in each setting.

Appearance consists of dress, uniform and other props which would serve to portray to the audience the performer's social statuses and elucidate on the individual's social state or role such as gender, status, occupation, age and personal attributes. Manner on its part is the behavioral and open component showing how an individual plays his role and effects his demeanor in terms of expressive attributes such as aggression, receptivity, dominance or subservience. The stage according to Goffman consists of two platforms: the front stage, back stage. The front stage is the part of the actor's performance which functions to define the situation for the audience. It is the image or the impression which he gives off to the audience. Performance in the front stage is often programmed to validate and meet up with the expectations of the audience because the actor knows that he/she is being watched. The *back stage* on the other hand is the region where the actor may behave differently than when in front of the audience. Here the actor gets to be himself or herself and even gets rid of the roles that he or she plays in the front of the audience. A question to ask is, how then does Goffman's theory apply to the feminine construction of the self using selfie?

If as Goffman argues, *Performance* describes all the activity of an individual in front of a particular set of audience and observers, then selfie-taking may be considered as a performance through which an individual consciously and unconsciously ascribes meanings to himself/herself and others and their situations. Through this performance, impressions are delivered to others to communicate and project to them what the actor wants them to think of his/her identity. The physical platform and environment being used to take selfies qualifies as *the setting* and its constituent *scenery, props and locations* too. Other fitting elements of setting include everything making it possible to fiddle with selfie pictures to construct and reconstruct the self such as the physical space and place wherein selfies are taken as well as the virtual space allowing for images of self -selfies to be presented for viewership by others including social media platforms such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram among others. As in Goffman's argument, different settings would have different audiences to whom diverse but fitting performances would be presented.

The elements in selfie that would qualify as *appearance* would include the *dress, wears and other* paraphernalia being worn by performers - anyone taking selfies, in a bid to portray and communicate to the audience his/her social statuses, social state or role such as gender, status, class, occupation, age and personal attributes. Because *manner* is the behavioral open component showing how an individual plays his role and effects his demeanor, this paper operationally argues that role may be reclassified as those *mannerism(s)* displayed in the use of photo gadgetries such as smartphones as well as their component applications which are useful in capturing, constructing and presenting whatever emanates as selfies.

INDEPENDENCE AND THE EMOTIONAL CONSTRUCTION OF THE SELF

Freedom and independence are two attributes of selfie-taking. Nothing but the freedom afforded by the dexterity of modern smartphones is the reason why a person would snap a picture several times over just in order to have that single one qualifying as the selfie. All that is needed, even if you do not own a smartphone, is to have access to one, to have mastery of it, and to take your selfie wherever and whenever without any limitations such as that of reliance on others for help. You may decide to pose as you wish to and not necessarily as you are doctored to by the dictates of a professional photographer. This makes selfie-taking



nothing but an independent construction of the self, made possible by the innovation of 'front cameras' in smartphones, - a technology which now complements the 'back camera' technology of traditional photography. The possibility of independently constructing the self using the 'front-camera' technology is in fact, the hallmark of the phenomenon called selfie as noted below:

I personally feel that the name selfie describes the fact that cameras, especially those on phones, now have improved settings. Back in the days we only had back cameras, and we could not take pictures ourselves except with the help of someone but now with improved technology, we can take a shot without asking anybody to help us. (IDI /Female Participant)

Independence and flexibility also mean that:

With selfie you do not have to go through the stress of having someone take a picture for you, you can always take it by yourself and just so you know, selfie always feels more intimate than a normal picture. (IDI /Female Participant).

Besides independence and freedom, intimacy is another variable which defines the construction of the self with selfies. As above, intimacy arises not between a person and another person but between a person and his/her selfie. And this intimacy comes from people's tendency to develop affection for selfies more than they would for ordinary photos/pictures. This way, selfies move from being ordinary objects into the status of subjects that can be loved and with whom bond is built. To go as far as saying that "*selfies always feel more intimate than a normal picture*" is to subjectify them and to emotionally portray them as living things or at best, as extensions of the actual self. These emotions even play out in the moods guiding whether or not selfies are taken and when in fact they are taken as noted in the comment that "*I generally think that selfie-taking has a lot to do with moods. So I take my selfies when I am happy*" (IDI/Female Student). As emotion towards selfies grow, selfie-taking gradually becomes a matter of impulse that is expressed as reflex and -a part of the person's everyday life. This is confirmed by the interviewee who said "*Whenever I am feeling fresh, I could just think out loud and say, oh my God, let me take a selfie to see how good I look this morning*" (IDI/Female Student). Supportively, another said: "*when I sit down, and I feel very flashy, I could go, hey, why not take a selfie right now so as to capture my great complexion*" (IDI /Female Student). Still another said: "*I take a selfie when I am excited and I feel like I look more beautiful*". "*I take selfie to check how beautiful I am*" (IDI /Female Participant).

Two things happen with the ongoing construction of the self, as emotion and intimacy develop towards selfies: selfie-taking becomes ritualized; and the selfie image itself becomes aestheticized creating what may be called a 'ritualized aestheticization' of the self. Whereas ritualization is that tendency to repeatedly and routinely take selfies, aestheticization on the other hand, refers to the meanings and value of beauty that people taking selfies emotionally attach to them. As would be seen, people's derivation of pleasure and gratification from their selfies, naturally motivates an aesthetic attachment to their selfie and the self that such a selfie represents. It is when selfies are subjectified as the 'beautiful' self that the motivation and desire come to routinely take them in order to capture, to savor and to perpetuate that sense of beauty that one's selfie image offers. To this end, an interviewee notes that "*I love taking selfies everyday so that people will know that I am very very beautiful and so that I can get the feeling that I am gorgeous*" (IDI /Female Student). The craving for reassurance from others about this beautiful self and the savor it brings explains why "*You could be motivated to take many selfies when you are walking so that people continue to acknowledge you with comments such as - wow! You look perfect*" (IDI /Female Participant). With ritualized aestheticization of the self as beautiful, people develop emotional fixation and attachment to their selfies that it becomes incredibly difficult to separate or put asunder to the actual self taking selfies and that aesthetic self being constructed by one's selfie and vice-versa. A supporting explanation is offered by this puzzled observer:

"People see selfie as their way of life, as the only thing in their lives and they see it as their own culture which I find quite disturbing. In

fact, presently, selfie is so much a part of people's life now that without it they do not get to live their normal lives anymore" (IDI /Female Participant).

Fixation with this beautiful self becomes so obsessive that even the boundaries of sacredness, as well as that of sanctity and formality of place, space and time are completely removed and rendered inconsequential. This explains why *"People could spend so much time on selfie when going to lecture rooms and why some even take selfies when they are in the house of God. Some even take selfies in the toilet and one is forced to wonder" (IDI /Female Participant)*. What the ritualized aestheticization of self means is that, when it comes to selfie, the construction of the self is boundless: it is so strong that it overlooks the sacredness of worship space, displaces the formality of institutions such as classrooms and lecture halls and ignores the abjection of unceremonial places such as the toilet space as noted above. Overtime, the ritualized aesthesization of the self becomes so powerful that it is relied upon for succor from boredom and depended upon as an escape, and a 'go-to' when one needs to be happy or keep alive. Little wonder an interviewee said: *"I take my selfies once I do not have classes or when the class is boring. In short, once I have a free time, all I just want to do is to take a selfie" (IDI /Female Participant)*. Thus, selfies as aesthetic subjects and selfie-taking as a ritual gradually become the new normal and the actor's own frame of reference as explained by the view that: *"you do not feel normal without taking selfies. At some other times, not taking selfies makes you feel like you are not at the top of the world or that you do not matter at all" (IDI /Female Participant)*. As the aestheticized-self, selfies become nothing but the mirror and measure of one's beauty, hence the explanation that *"I take a selfie to check how beautiful I am and to check if my dressing is good or not" (IDI /Female Participant)*. Another interviewee even goes as far as linking the intensity of a person's beauty to the frequency of selfies taken, saying that: *"the number of times you take selfies is an indication of how beautiful you are" (IDI /Female Participant)*. On the one hand, this definition of the self simply means that a person's beauty is framed not only in terms of physical appearance but also in terms of photos and the number of times they are taken. Besides, as far as selfies -aestheticized self is concerned, beauty is framed not as a fixed attribute of the photo version of the self but also as a progressive value that grows depending on the flexibility of the makeup of the smartphone being used for the selfie.

The relationship between people and their selfies even moves from an emotive into dialogic one overtime. This is because out of love and affection for them, and out of the fear of losing the gratifying sense of beauty which they bring, people begin to define selfies as memorial subjects that must be preserved, if continued relations with them will be assured. One way to preserve bonds with them is by materializing them physically into tangible forms in order to preserve memories of the beautiful but passing events as noted below: *"You can make your selfie into a picture frame and you can even edit it and document some of them in order to remember a particular time or event of your life" (IDI /Female Participant)*. Selfies to be preserved for this purpose must equally embody an aesthetic sense of self that brings gratification, whenever its owner decides to revisit them as noted below:

"sometimes I could just take a selfie when am just waking up and I realize I look good. At such point I would want to save that memory so I can savor it later. Sometimes I take it when I am wearing my finest cloth" (IDI /Female Participant).

Apart from preserving memories of the aesthetic self, people *"...take selfies to keep record of their self-image at a particular point in time"*, and they also use selfies to document aesthetic moments and times of their lives -. Hence, *"a selfie can be used to document history and to document one's past"*. Explaining the dexterous ability of selfies to provide the self with gratification, both in the present and in the future, an interviewee said:

"... it is possible to have a selfie of you on your wallpaper, which you probably took last year, but due to the fact that you like the shirt you wore in it and how it makes you look, you can decide to use it as your wallpaper, the following year. That way you make history. In other words, selfie has a historical dimension, and it tells the story of time too.



I can even say that selfie images somehow influence the meaning we attach to time...”(IDI /Female Participant).

FRONT-STAGING AND THE REMAKING OF SELF

Now we turn to the use of selfies for what is described contextually as ‘front-staging’ and ‘the remaking of the self’. It is not unusual for people to see selfies and the selfie-technology as means for constructing and framing the beautiful self or the aestheticized-self, as already seen. Yet it seems that there is more to selfie-taking than meets the eyes. Selfies may initially appear as photographic images that portray a person’s beauty. Nonetheless, a critical look at how far people are willing to go, in the usage of the dexterous selfie technology of the smartphone, raises questions as to whether this beauty being framed is about the real self or an idealized self. For instance, in saying that *“a selfie can only be considered a selfie if and only if it is dope”* and in saying that *“To take a good selfie, you just have to look good”* (IDI /Female Participant), the insinuation is simple. That selfies are not pictures portraying how a person actually looks but how beautiful a person is made to look by selfies. If it has to be “dope” to be considered as selfie, then a selfie is nothing but an outcome of ‘sorting out the good’ and ‘screening out the bad’. The drive to have the ‘dope’ which involves the taking of a picture several times over, is in fact what defines the construction of the self in the context of selfie. The implication of ‘sorting out the good’ and that of ‘screening out the bad’ is the singling out of a picture from the several pictures of the self taken, or to have one to be endorsed for approval, and to reject others unworthy of projecting the ‘ideal image of the self. Yet, the irony is that all of these images, including the endorsed as well as the unendorsed are all photographed images of one and the same person. Also, if “you just have to look good” in order “to take a good selfie”, then selfies by nature are portrayed as nothing but mirrors of the beautiful self and nothing less. The activities of sorting out and screening out including those of expunging, imply two things, that selfie images are not products of the real self but outcomes of conscious ‘remaking’ of aesthetic impressions of self through the help of modern selfie gadgets such as smartphones.

Secondly, the image of the self being constructed using selfies is not necessarily, or does not have to be the actual image of the self but the ones which supply to the real self, with a sense of pleasure and gratification, whether these two look alike or not. Hence, the expression by an interviewee that - *“selfie captures everything about one’s beauty and one’s fine appearance”*. The aesthetic impression of the self is buttressed by the thought that, *“When I (one) take (s) a selfie I(one) feel(s) gorgeous”*. In a similar fashion, another said when *“I take selfies, they make me feel excited, and make me see how beautiful I am and how my dressing looks”* (IDI /Female Participant). Still another said, *“I take selfie because I want to see my face and feel good about myself”* (IDI /Female Participant). If selfies, are nothing but outcomes of sorting out the good and screening out the bad, then more than just being mirrors of self, this paper argues that selfie by its very nature depicts what Goffman defines as the ‘front’ while the person’s real self as well as the pictures being screened out represent the ‘back stage’. Goffman defines the front-staging as that establishment of social identity’ in which an individual projects a particular image apart from the normal, natural self (Barnhart, n.d). Front-staging and back-staging would therefore be depicted concurrently and respectively by the dual process of ‘sorting out of good’ images and ‘screening out of the (perceptually) bad’ images of the self. With front-staging and back-staging, a new self that arises, in addition to the ritually aestheticized self is the ‘idealized self’. Beyond the process of ‘screening out the bad’ or the ‘less than beautiful’ pictures of the self, an explanation is offered on how the use of photo-technology also comes into play in the production of that exaggerated image of self, otherwise called the ‘idealized self’.

*“some colored pictures are not as nice as white-and-black.
Thus, editing a picture makes a difference and every individual
has to edit like a pro”* (IDI /Female Participant).

The above explanation justifies the earlier position that mastery of smartphone use is crucial when it comes to the constructing self using selfie, and in this case, the idealized self. The question here is, if it is really the actual image of the self that is being framed, why would you

need to tinker with the coloration of the image to have another version of it? To answer this question, an interviewee, in the explanation following, even identifies that it is possible, with your selfie to look natural but it is also possible with selfie, for someone who is not or does not feel beautiful to attain a beautiful look. Hence, *“A selfie should be natural but for those who do not feel beautiful enough they can decide to edit their pictures in order to look more beautiful” (IDI /Female Participant).*

In fact, the presence of, and use of the ‘filter technology’ inbuilt in smartphones is identified by some interviewees as the hallmark of ‘the selfie’. With it a selfie is considered as complete and without it, there is no such thing as a selfie: *“The point when a selfie becomes complete and perfect is after the filters... and by that I mean after the picture has been edited. In fact, filtering is usually helpful especially when you know you are not fine” (IDI /Female Participant).* The point here is clear, I may not be beautiful by nature, but to look good, all I need is to take a selfie of me and the narrative changes. In fact, unlike in the construction of the ‘aesthetic self’ where repeated or routine taking of selfies brings out the beautiful self, mastery of the ‘filtering’ technology of the smartphone is what enables the new definition of beautiful. The more sophisticated your phone is, the closer you are to taking a good selfie and the likelier you are to look beautiful if you are not, and more beautiful if you already are. That explains why *“...the camera for a good selfie matters and it depends on the phone which a person uses. I think SAMSUNG phones are number one phones for very good selfies” (FGD /Female Participant).*

Conversely, the less sophisticated the phone is, the farther away a person is from taking a selfie and the less likely they are to create an ‘idealized self’. This is because: *“You cannot just use a phone having a terrible M.P (Mega-Pixel) because it would not just speak well of you and that also means that you would not be able to edit it properly” (IDI /Female Participant).*

Mastery also means that:

To take a good selfie, you only need to position your camera properly, carefully consider and select the appropriate filter and consider ‘where’ (social media platform) you’re going to post it.... For instance, if Instagram is your target, then you’ll need to take a square picture (IDI /Female Participant).

From the foregoing, one can assert that selfie-taking as a construction of the ‘idealized self’, is all about nothing but the framing of a ‘front’ image of the self rather than the framing of one’s actual image of self. The intuition lying behind it is the tendency to remanufacture the self by creative processes motivated by idealized and fantasized impressions about one’s image of self. It is only in this sense, that selfies become describable as the projector of a person’s inner beauty as noted below: *“The taking of selfie is a means for bringing out one’s inner beauty because you can change your face and do it how you like it” (IDI /Female Participant).* To subject the construction of the self to tools of technology on the smartphone devices such as the ‘filter’, in order to derive gratification about an aesthetic self, is to engage in constructing a self that is far from real. Hence, the assertion by a critical interviewee that: *“Selfie only tries to deceive people and make them feel what they are not. It even makes them feel happy about what they are not” (IDI /Female Participant).* Perhaps the reason for the distance between the real self and the ideal self created by the construction of the ‘ideal self’ is nothing but psychological gratification as contained in this explanation: *“what selfies do is to make people feel pretty even when they are not pretty at all. I think it just tries to help them boost their morale and make them feel better about themselves” (IDI /Female Participant).* The above question also implies that in the process of using selfies to construct an ‘idealized self’, what happens is a ‘remaking’ of the self that ends up creating a self other than the real one and a self that validates personal impressions of its owner.

From the findings, the ‘background’ where selfies are taken has also been identified as a crucial element in the construction of the ‘idealized self’. This fits aptly into what Goffman calls the *setting* in his ‘presentation of self in everyday life’. As with the foregoing findings, the intuition underlying the framing of the “background” shows that since the ‘good’, ‘dope’ and gratifying selfies are all about aesthetics and idealization, then it follows automatically too that

for any background to be used for a selfie photo, such a background must equally fit into and project the *aesthetic* and the *idealized*. The symbolism of the background to any selfie is expatiated in the view that: *The environment is very significant for taking selfie*. Similarly, *“taking a selfie is about getting a good position or getting a good spot. You have to know the place where you’ll look very nice and then, you compose your body”* (FGD /Female Participant). Good backgrounds are prerequisites for taking good selfies whether the pictures will be edited or not. Beyond that however, beautiful and attractive backgrounds can be sources of inspiration and encouragement for selfie-taking. An interviewee noted that: *“I like a place that is decorated with flowers You know, at times when you get to a place that is clean and very beautiful, you’ll be motivated to take a selfie”* (IDI /Female Participant).

The inspirational effect of a fine *background* is further buttressed by the interviewee who said: *“Sometimes you could be walking by and you suddenly come across a fine house or building and you would just tell yourself ... let me borrow this background for my selfie”* (IDI /Female Participant). The incompleteness of a selfie that is devoid of a good and aesthetic *background* is highlighted by the interviewee who said: *“even though your selfie is the best in the world, that selfie is a function of the context used in taking it”* (IDI /Female Participant). With the significance accorded to good *backgrounds* for selfies, anyone constructing and producing an ‘idealized self’ through selfie must therefore remain conscious of the background to be used. And the requirement for this is simple: *“you have to look for a ‘confirmed’ (very good) place to take such a picture, and such a place has to be ‘dope”*. Besides, once they are selfies, they have become far removed from the attributes of conventional photography in that they must among other things be autobiographers of the person’s idealized image of self. They must be self-narrative of event, people, place and even moments. And no other element does a better job at this than the background and the *setting* being used for the selfie. Anyone who does not wish to allow for misinterpretation or misunderstanding of these elements in his/her idealized image of the self, must therefore pay very close attention to the choice of a background. Hence the explanation that, *‘your selfie tells its story and every selfie depends on the kind of story it is telling but what matters more is that the background is part of the story of the picture’* (IDI /Female Participant). Extolling the credibility and aesthetic prowess embedded in carefully selected backgrounds, an interviewee from Bowen University reflects romantically and with ecstasy over the role that a good background plays in the framing of an idealized self:

I think the ideal place to take a selfie is a place like chapel (a place in Bowen renowned for its unrivaled beauty and state of the art appearance). In fact, taking a selfie at that library staircase makes you appear as if you are in one small London. You could even tell someone naïve or unsuspecting that, you were in the US when you took such a picture and they would not doubt you at all. You see the location for selfie must be one that portrays and that accords your selfie very great prestige and respect. (FGD /Female Participant)

In the construction of the ‘idealized self’, one must carefully ensure that the aesthetic character of the choice background and setting must match favorably with the aesthetic story that the image in the background is projecting, otherwise there will be a conflict of stories that would interfere with the ideality of the intended image. In no way at all should the background contain what may be classified as de-marketers of the self’s grandeur as noted below:

There are people who use backgrounds where their undies are hung outside... so imagine that after having done heavy makeup and I go outside looking very fine and beautiful; I decide to take a snapshot of myself using the same background where I spread those things. No matter how beautiful my selfies may be, its quality would be affected by those undies because some people will be looking at and concentrate on the background, and they would not pay attention to me. The truth is that the background can make or spoil the makeup, the picture and the selfie (FGD /Female Participant).

Corroborating the above, still another noted that *“To have a good shot, you cannot take your selfies in just any dirty place”*. The foregoing simply goes to show that selfie-taking is a front-staging enterprise that consists of complex conscious processes that work to achieve the production of an idealized image of the self. Every activity that goes into this process aim at nothing but the remaking of the self from what it is to what it is desired to reflect and appear as. To become beautiful, no originality is required when it comes to looks, only the ability to wield into existence the ideal image of the self, using the apparatus of the selfie technology inbuilt in smartphones. A simple way to describe this dramaturgy of the self is simple, ‘with my selfie, I can be me and even more’, as the article’s title reflects.

For Goffman’s theory, it can be argued that photo-technology is so crucial not only in the construction of the self as it is but in the remaking of the self. Beyond his assertion that dramaturgy entails the construction of the self, this study asserts a construction of an aesthetic self. It also asserts, beyond the construction of an aesthetic self, a reconstruction of the self as the new form which dramaturgy is taking with the possibilities made available by modern technology in photography. Three selves are brought to the fore as a result: the actual self, representing the back stage of the actor’s performance, the aesthetic self, depicting beauty-consciousness as one of the performance props in this unfolding drama, and the idealized self, representing the front-stage of performance in which everything deployed, including tools of photo-technology such as filters are aimed at remaking of the self. Of course, the background is not left out in the dramaturgical construction of the third self. The underlying intuition behind the actors’ performance here is nothing but a raptured inhabitation of a make-believe world where no such thing as wishes, regrets or limitations about one’s appearance and self exist at all. This is so because the self is not necessarily what it is but what it is imagined and remanufactured to become in order to attain a near-perfect if not an exaggerated sense of self beauty.

The Selfie itself, the camera-phone accessories facilitating its use and the very use of these paraphernalia to construct and project the self all reflect Goffman’s “appearance”. As he puts it, appearance consists of the “dress, uniform and other props” that serve to portray to the audience the performer’s social statuses and other personal attributes (Thompson and Tuntall, 1976).

PERFORMANCE AND THE PRESENTATION OF SELF

As Goffman argues, different settings have different audiences and the performer alters his performance to fit each one. All of the processes highlighted earlier qualify as the ‘construction of the self’ while all of the discussions in the section following reflect the ‘presentation’ of the constructed self or what Goffman theoretically describes as the stage ‘performance’. The complex processes of sorting out the good and screening out the bad all fit into what he calls the ‘alteration of the self’ which is basically aimed at entertaining and satisfying the audience present in the theatre. As interviewees reveal, the presentation of the self to others remains in fact a primary intuition behind the taking of selfies in the first place as noted below:

The information in your selfie depends on who you are targeting and to whom the image is directed. It might be an individual, a group, somebody or nobody in particular. The selfie could be taken and posted to pass across a piece of information, express feelings and/or show fun events around the individual. (IDI /Female Participant).

In fact, as would be seen, a selfie is even defined as incomplete when and if it is not oriented or directed towards others or posted on the social media as the case may be. The social media platform facilitates the presentation of the aesthetic and the idealized self. For any selfie to achieve its communicative essence, it has to be posted online and this shows that a person is alive and part of the growing world as an interviewee opines that *“I think selfies are about information passage from one person to another especially on the social media.”* This goes forward to substantiate prevailing literature views that the pressure for online presence and interaction is a key to the generative logic of selfie (Stevens-Rayburn & Burton, 1998, p. 1). And the view that the online selfie environment provides the subject an opportunity to frame,



define and refine the self through facial behaviours and expressions (Baker & Walsh, 2018; Walsh & Baker, 2017)

DISCUSSION

Advancement in technology especially the development of front cameras on mobile phones has contributed to the projection of the 'idealized self'. The existence of modern mediated photography has made picture-taking very flexible with a move from dependent to independent photography and thus, the importance for studying people's tendency to express the 'self' in certain ways. Selfie is now seen as an 'intimate' and 'personal' thing which affects the construction of self in everyday life.

Hinging on Ervin Goffman's theory and the presentation of self in everyday life, this study has explored the social construction of self in terms of *performance, setting, appearance, manner and stage*. Based on the tenets of Goffman's theory, selfie-taking ascribes certain meaning to individuals consciously or unconsciously and these meanings are portrayed to others. Taking selfies require certain locations, dressing and costumes that will best portray the mood and story to be told and this is also determined by the mannerism and appearance of the individual in the selfie. An individual's confidence and aesthetic beauty is therefore not framed in physical appearance but in selfies and the number of times they are taken. The aesthetic and idealized self is further expressed in the positions individuals take while taking selfies as certain positions, setting and appearance reflects perfect images of the self that become essential to friendship with others. Taking many selfies and selecting one out of many alternatives reflects how 'good-looking' an individual has to be to portray a particular construction of the 'self'.

Selfies are taken for different reasons and modified to construct the 'self' suitably to attain fame, social relationships, marketing, self-promotion, publicity and/or followership. All of these reflect the front-stage where individual actors portray certain characteristics that they want to showcase and then hide their real selves in the back-stage.

Taking selfies for different reasons and constructing the 'self' in certain ways is not complete if the selfie is not posted as posting on social media serves as an index for measuring a person's personality in this era and not posting makes individuals invisible to a modern world dominated by social media.

This paper demonstrates that indeed, with one's selfie comes also the possibility to project not only the actual self but also images of the imagined, the aestheticized and even the idealized self. This possibility is enhanced by digital evolution in self-portrait photography, depending upon a subjectively constructed self and the presentation of this self in an exuberant dramaturgical performance. The lens of Goffman's dramaturgy reveals how everyday life in a selfie era is one of a constant attempt at producing nothing less than an idealized and a front stage self constructed to fit into idealized fantasies of the person while the real self is carefully and delicately being concealed in the back stage through possibilities inherent in and afforded by modern digital technology. What follows is the flexible and momentary taking-on and taking off of the self at will depending on one's access to and affinity with today's invasive smartphone technology. The key point is that, selfie enables a blanketing of finitude photography and accords infinitude to self-portraiture before physical and digital everyday audiences. Beauty is no longer what lies in the eyes of the beholder but what lies in the mastery and dexterity of photo-fingers. How beautiful you are is not a matter of how you actually are defined but how you can be defined and how willing you are to satisfy everyday audience by the bondless digital making and remaking of the self. No matter his/her choice and whatever it is, it is clear that new research must therefore transcend beyond confines of Goffman's lens to explore sister lenses such as the actionist and interpretivist perspectives to deeply uncover selfie in its prospective senses and contexts bordering around the bodied and the embodied, the social and even the philosophical contestations and contextualities of the phenomenon in everyday life.



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