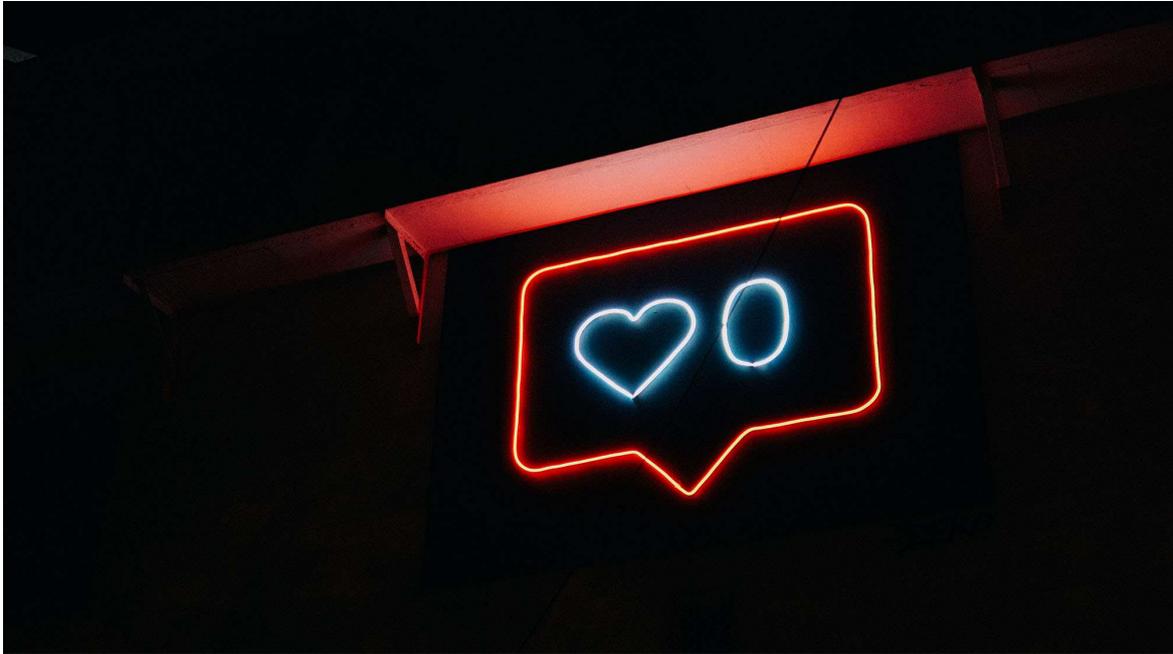


Selfies and Self-Love

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Through different waves of influencer culture, and fad products like the ‘selfie-stick’, the meaning of ‘selfie’ has evolved – and is still evolving – over time. Today, our feeds contain fewer hand-held photos taken with the front camera, and more shots taken by willing friends (whether posed, candid or ‘candid’).

We use selfies to tell a story of more than just our appearance. In their location, they show interests, hobbies, even wealth. In their caption, they declare your identity: serious and insightful, witty and clever, quote or lyric lover. Shots taken in cultural spots, with friends, by friends, or at occasions and celebrations worthy of the grid – they all say something more than just ‘this is what I look like’.

We are the first generation with the opportunity to curate our personality online like this, even dictate people’s first impressions of us. Your personality – for many, your personality for the last decade – is represented through your social feed, your curated grid, your timeline.

I used to curate my Instagram feed like this. Selfies also inherently advertise confidence. Thinking on it, there’s something so powerful about picking up your phone, taking a photo of yourself and posting it. It implies confidence, comfort, and even declares: ‘I think I look good here – don’t you agree?’

Posting a selfie, then, was a way to declare my self-love. But I would count the likes and pore over the comments, searching desperately for people to agree that I looked good and to do so by double tapping or heart-reacting. Surely, this isn’t what true self-love looks like? This faux confidence wasn’t confidence at all.

To an extent, I spent years creating an online persona that was far more 'confident' than the real me. I was literally typing myself into existence, crafting the me I wanted to be but, more importantly, the me I wanted to be perceived as.

I still do, to a degree, worry about my feed. Of course, we're all careful with how we portray ourselves, and sometimes I'm fearful that my self-love and self-confidence comes across as arrogance. I'm definitely still a little conscious of what I'm posting and when.

Mainly, though, as my self-love has grown – through, as frustratingly simple as it sounds, growing up, experiencing more, and prioritizing different things – my desire to have a curated feed has diminished. This doesn't mean I don't post, but merely that I don't post *as much*, saving the moments I crave validation for myself – for moments in the mirror, moments of reflection and reconnection with myself. I've learnt to validate my own worth the way a like counter never could.

I also increasingly feel that I don't need to advertise my personality to know it's real. It's another form of internet validation: the craving to be funny, relatable, and to have followers because of this, not because you take good pictures of yourself (or someone else does).

I'm an avid Instagram story poster, so this could all seem a bit disingenuous, a bit unaware. But I'm talking comparably – in comparison to my past self – and I'm still growing away from my obsession with internet validation. Now, my camera roll contains probably over 1000 more selfies than any of my feeds combined. I keep my Instagram private, sharing the funny moments for my friends' eyes only with no desire to use my account for anything other than personal posting.

I still take selfies, I still post them sometimes, but mostly I keep them for myself: to admire, to see how I've grown, to laugh at when I pull a funny face.