UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM
University of Birmingham Research at Birmingham

Self-denigration and the mixed messages of 'ugly' selfies in Instagram

Page, Ruth

DOI:
10.1075/ip.00035.pag

License:
None: All rights reserved

Document Version
Peer reviewed version

Citation for published version (Harvard):
Page, R 2019, 'Self-denigration and the mixed messages of 'ugly' selfies in Instagram', *Internet Pragmatics*, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 173-205. https://doi.org/10.1075/ip.00035.pag

Link to publication on Research at Birmingham portal

Publisher Rights Statement:
Checked for eligibility: 19/09/2019

Page, R., 2019. Self-denigration and the mixed messages of 'ugly'selfies in Instagram. Internet Pragmatics. https://doi.org/10.1075/ip.00035.pag. © John Benjamins Publishing Company. Contact John Benjamins Publishing Company for permission to re-use or reprint the material in any form.

General rights
Unless a licence is specified above, all rights (including copyright and moral rights) in this document are retained by the authors and/or the copyright holders. The express permission of the copyright holder must be obtained for any use of this material other than for purposes permitted by law.

•Users may freely distribute the URL that is used to identify this publication.
•Users may download and/or print one copy of the publication from the University of Birmingham research portal for the purpose of private study or non-commercial research.
•User may use extracts from the document in line with the concept of 'fair dealing' under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (?)
•Users may not further distribute the material nor use it for the purposes of commercial gain.

Where a licence is displayed above, please note the terms and conditions of the licence govern your use of this document.

When citing, please reference the published version.

Take down policy
While the University of Birmingham exercises care and attention in making items available there are rare occasions when an item has been uploaded in error or has been deemed to be commercially or otherwise sensitive.

If you believe that this is the case for this document, please contact UBIRA@lists.bham.ac.uk providing details and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate.

Download date: 13. Oct. 2026

Self-denigration and the mixed messages of 'ugly' selfies in Instagram

Abstract

This paper sets out a new, multimodal account (both visual and verbal analysis) of how self-denigration is conveyed through 'ugly selfies' as posted to the photo-sharing site Instagram. Drawing on 226 Instagram posts categorised by the poster themselves with the hashtag #uglyselfie, the visual analysis compared the persons and setting in the selfie, the person's facial expression (eye brow position, mouth expression), eye gaze and camera angle. The verbal analysis included the self-denigration found in the image caption and the rapport enhancing or threatening responses found in the comments to the image posted by others. Ugly selfies are found to convey various types of self-denigration, including self-deprecation and self-mockery. The difference between self-deprecation and self-mockery are explained by the types of 'mixed messages' generated by the images. In self-deprecation, the mixed messages arise from a contrast between the visual image and the verbal caption. In self-mockery, the mixed messages arise from contrasts within the image itself, where visual exaggeration and incongruity lead to a jocular interpretation of the ugly selfie. Although the focus in this paper is on self-denigration and selfie-taking, the analysis of mixed messages can be used to analyse many different forms of politeness strategies and many kinds of images shared with increasing frequency and importance on social media sites.

Keywords: self-denigration, self-deprecation, self-mockery, selfies, humour, Instagram, ugly selfies

1. Introduction

1.1 Selfie-taking as a new context for self-denigration

Image-sharing sites such as Instagram are increasingly popular as online platforms for self-presentation. In 2018, Instagram reported that the site had surpassed a billion members. Selfies are a prominent type of image within the content found on Instagram (Hu et al., 2014). A selfie places complex interpersonal demands on the person who posts and those who interact with them. On the one hand, selfie-taking can been conceptualised as a strategic performance, designed to promote an idealised version of the self. In particular, selfie-taking as a positive politeness gesture, is concerned with promoting what Spencer-Oatey (2002) describes as a person's *quality face*, that is, the desire to be approved of in relation to one's

personal qualities, including their competence, abilities and appearance. On the other hand, as Matley (2018a) argues, self-promotion is interactionally risky. This is especially fraught for selfie-taking, which is stigmatised (Balakrishan, 2017), so that the selfie-taker's need to make a 'good showing' (Goffman, 1959, p.5) through their image-sharing is coupled with the need to avoid accusations of vanity and narcissism (Abidin, 2016). The selfie-taker is faced with a dilemma: how to present their idealised self, but also comply with Leech's (2014) modesty maxim, that is, to minimize the praise of self. One way in which the selfie-taker might manage this delicate balancing act is to use self-denigration.

Self-denigration is a key issue within pragmatics. It is best thought of as an umbrella term which incorporates a number of relational strategies that involve the speaker downplaying or lowering an aspect of their self-representation relative to their interlocutor (Walkinshaw et al., 2019: 41) and is typically seen in opposition to self-praise (Dayter, 2014). Self-denigration is widely used across many different cultural contexts, but has been analysed for the most part in relation to conversational interactions, e.g. Pomerantz (1984) who explored self-denigration as a type of assessment offered by speakers in their conversations which resulted in preferred responses of a face-enhancing nature. In sociolinguistic studies, Holmes' (1986) work on compliments and compliment responses found that the use of and responses to self-denigration was sensitive to speaker variables such as gender. The focus on verbal forms of self-denigration is found similarly in intercultural pragmatics, as seen in Kim's (2015) study of Korean conversations, Yu's (2013) work on self-mockery in conversational exchanges between Finnish students, Zare's (2016) analysis of Persian interactions, the study of mock jocularity in Australian data (Haugh, 2010) and self-denigrating humour (Schnurr and Chan, 2011) in Hong Kong and New Zealand.

In the emerging field of Internet pragmatics, the study of self-denigration has likewise remained focused on the verbal aspects of written interactions, for example, as it occurs in response to compliments found in computer-mediated contexts such as micro-blogging sites and social network sites (Maiz-Arevalo, 2013; Placencia et al., 2016), and as a mitigating strategy used to counterbalance the self-aggrandisement of bragging in posts on Twitter (Dayter, 2014). Even where a study has explored data from an image-sharing site, like Instagram, the analysis of self-denigration has remained focused on specific, verbal aspects of the post, such as the caption (Matley, 2018a and 2018b) and the images given only passing mention rather than systematic attention in the pragmatic analysis. We do not yet know how self-denigration is conveyed by the multimodal resources used in online contexts, and in particular, how images are used for this purpose. Given that image-sharing is now the most

frequently used form of online communication for young people (Anderson and Jiang, 2018) with significant consequences for their sense of identity and social relationships (Wang, 2017), the need to develop multimodal models that account for the interpersonal work of selfies within pragmatics is particularly pressing.

In the research on verbal forms of self-denigration, the pragmatic outcomes of the strategies have been conceptualised as a form of positive politeness, where self-denigration is 'interactionally safe' (Schnurr and Chan, 2010). However, recently scholars have begun to question how far the unequivocal categorisation of relational strategies as polite or impolite can hold. Instead, Culpeper et al. (2017) propose that examining the mixed interpersonal messages in (im)politeness is a more productive way to approach the complex ways in which relational work is performed. By taking a multimodal approach to self-denigration, I will show how the messages conveyed through selfies can be mixed in various ways across and between different semiotic modes of communication (visual and verbal). This results in a more nuanced conceptualisation of self-denigration, which is founded on an integrated approach to multimodality.

The integrated multimodal framework I propose for self-denigration takes forward the emerging, empirical work on visual-verbal forms of communication in social media (for an overview, see Adami and Jewitt, 2016). This integrated approach is much needed, for as Machin et al. (2016: 303) point out, within applied linguistics multimodal approaches have tended to develop in different sub-fields, between which there is 'little dialogue'. Indeed, the multimodal accounts of selfies in earlier discourse-analytic research have been restricted to one particular linguistic subfield: social semiotics. For example, Kress and van Leeuwen's (1996) visual grammar is applied by Veum and Undrum (2018) to their dataset of selfies, and it underpins Zappavigna (2016), Zhao and Zappavigna (2018) and Page (2019) who have developed iterative accounts of the intersubjectivity in selfie-taking. The main contribution of these social semiotic studies has been to draw attention to the interpersonal potential of selfies, where the use of mediated resources such as camera angle and proximity are considered as invitations to position the sender and recipient of the images relative to one another. However, there has not yet been any empirical analysis of the interactional context in which selfies are produced and hence how selfies are perceived (e.g. through the analysis of comment threads that respond to selfies). As a consequence, the interpersonal meaning potential of selfies has only been treated in rather broad terms, and specific strategies such as self-denigration have not yet been considered.

Within pragmatics, multimodal analysis has developed along different lines and focused on different types of data. In contrast to the scholarship in social semiotics, there has been no analysis of selfies and hence of the role that mediated resources for semiotic meaning (such as camera angle) might play in interpersonal meaning. Instead, scholars have shown the importance of facial expression and gesture in conveying complex forms of interpersonal meaning, such as humour (Tabacaru and Lemmens, 2014), irony and sarcasm (Attardo et al., 2003; Blitvich et al., 2013). Where the multimodal meanings in other media have been studied, these have focused on comic books (Forceville, 2005), postcards (Francesconi, 2011) and internet memes (Dynel, 2016; Yus, 2018).

In neither social semiotics or in pragmatics has self-denigration been explored in relation to selfies. The multimodal approach I propose fills this gap, firstly, by setting out an integrated model that combines the micro-level foci from social semiotics and pragmatics (i.e. the analysis of facial expression and the mediated affordances of selfie-taking); second, by focusing on a particular form of interpersonal work (the strategies of self-denigration and the mixed messages they convey) and third, by analysing the comments that respond to the images as evidence of how the self-denigration is perceived by the recipients of the selfies.

1.2 The subtypes of self-denigration: Self-deprecation and self-mockery

A range of relational strategies have been documented in earlier pragmatic work on self-denigration. These include *self-deprecation* as 'the act of belittling or undervaluing oneself and one's abilities' (Kim, 2015: 398). The contexts of use and the interpretation of self-deprecation can vary. For example, the speaker's self-deprecation can be open to denial (Pomerantz, 1984), or may be supported evidentially as a form of 'trouble talk' where the person can express a negative self-assessment that relates to a real problem (Kim, 2015). A further, distinct strategy of self-denigration is *self-mockery*, which 'involves playfully belittling oneself for various reasons' (Yu, 2013: 1) where the play frame is used by the speaker to introduce amusement into the interaction. However, amusement is not the only possible outcome and other dis-affiliative options are also possible, such as rejecting the mockery (Haugh, 2010: 2108). In order to map out more clearly the differences between these strategies and understand how images might contribute to their meaning, we must first establish the fundamental principles which underpin self-denigration as a whole.

I conceptualise self-denigration as an interactional process whereby the evaluation of the speaker is jointly negotiated between speaker and audience, within a given context. There are three elements involved in this interpersonal process, summarised visually in Figure 1.

First, the speaker makes a negative evaluation which downplays or belittles their attributes or achievements which threatens their quality face. Second, there is contextual evidence against which the speaker's negative evaluation is assessed. The third element is the audience who is addressed by the speaker and who interprets the negative assessment in the light of any available contextual evidence. Inevitably, self-denigration is contextually sensitive and the intersubjective nature of the evaluation by the speaker and audience may be shaped by further personal and socio-cultural norms. However, the responses from the audience may indicate the different relational outcomes which arise from the strategies included within self-denigration.

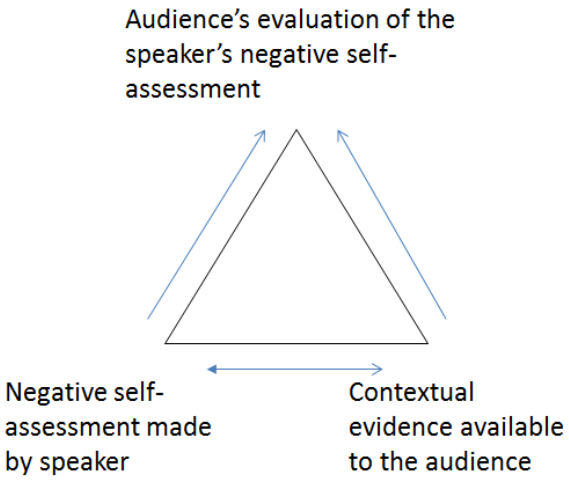

Figure 1. The factors involved in the interactional process of self-denigration

1.2.1 Prototypical self-deprecation. Prototypical self-deprecation occurs when the speaker offers a negative self-assessment which is at odds with the contextual evidence. Typically, the audience respond with a positive evaluation of the speaker that is at odds with the initial negative self-assessment, but builds the speaker's positive face. This may include compliments and denials of the self-deprecation.

1.2.2 Self-deprecation as 'Trouble talk'. The second form of self–deprecation occurs when the speaker's negative self-assessment is supported by the contextual evidence. In this case, usually the contextual evidence legitimizes the self-deprecation by framing it as some kind of 'trouble'. The audience response may be to evaluate the nature of the trouble in ways that express empathy or concern for the speaker.

1.2.3 Self-mockery. In contrast to prototypical self-deprecation and 'trouble talk', what is at stake in self-mockery is the style in which the speaker's negative self-assessment is offered. In his work on conversational self-mockery, Haugh (2010) reviewed the linguistic means by which a play frame has been signalled, which include the use of lexical exaggeration, overstatement, incongruous imagery, prosodic cues and laughter. The means by which the negative self-assessment is offered contain cues that the evaluation should not be taken seriously and the audience response to self-mockery may evidence its playful nature by using laughter.

The different types of self-denigration rely on the extent to which the evaluative dissonance is triggered within this intersubjective process and gives rise to a 'mixed message'. The idea of 'mixed messages' has recently been applied to some types of (im)politeness (Culpeper et al. 2017), with reference to other-directed strategies such as sarcasm, teasing, banter and mock (im)politeness. Here, I will show that mixed messages are also used within self-directed forms of politeness such as self-denigration. The visual and verbal components of Instagram posts contribute to these mixed messages and drawing on but going beyond the role of images as a form of evidential stance-taking (Matley, 2018a). This enables me to test and extend the existing categories of self-denigration against the new, multimodal forms of interaction that are increasingly important in online communication.

1.3 Ugly selfies

I will focus on just one kind of selfie which highlights the multimodal complexity of self-denigration in relation to image-sharing: the so-called 'ugly selfie'. The ugly selfie is a digital self-portrait which is seen as an alternative to the idealised norms of the 'perfect' appearance. In the accounts of the ugly selfie found in the mainstream media, these images are interpreted by journalists as a celebration of authenticity and considered to be a positive alternative to idealised selfies (see for example, Bennett, 2014). That is not to say that the ugly selfies are not carefully constructed, and in fact the person shown in the image is not physically ugly at all. However, we know very little about the ugly selfie and its potential to generate interactions that support or threaten the face needs of the selfie-taker. The ugly selfie has been discussed only in media studies where small-scale, ethnographic research has mentioned these selfies as a type of image shared privately between close friends. In these ethnographic studies, selfies have been studied in relation to social media services like Snapchat (Kofoed and Larsen, 2016) yet ugly selfies are also posted publicly on social media

sites like Instagram (where posts containing the hashtag #uglyselfie occurs in over 46,000 posts at the time of writing), Tumblr and Twitter.

The ugly selfie is particularly intriguing as a potential resource for self-denigration, for the modifier 'ugly' is a negative assessment of the selfie or the selfie-taker. For example, the Oxford English Dictionary defines 'ugly', as 'offensive or repulsive to the eye; unpleasing in appearance; of disagreeable or unsightly aspect'. To characterise a selfie in this way suggests that the image is likewise aesthetically flawed. In terms of politeness, this might seem to attack a person's quality face, either in terms of belittling their appearance or their ability to take a selfie, and thereby complying neatly with the modesty maxim and 'minimizing praise of self'. However, given the strong pro-social norms associated with beauty ideals, posting an ugly selfie is somewhat risky and might result in face-threatening forms of criticism.[1] Empirical analysis of these images and the responses that they generate can help us better understand the nuanced ways in which this type of selfie communicates and also the extent to which the potential self-denigration conveyed in this context might achieve positive or negative interactional outcomes for the selfie-taker.

2. Analysing Instagram 'Post Events'

In order to identify how images like 'ugly selfies' might generate different kinds of mixed messages used for self-denigration, they must be analysed in some context, not in isolation. Instagram posts are inescapably multimodal forms of networked communication, where meaning is conveyed through its visual and verbal components. Analogous to a Facebook 'wall event' (Androutsopoulos, 2013), I conceptualise the ugly selfies within the unit of an Instagram 'post event', where the pragmatic functions of the images are understood within their interactional context. Like Hymes' (1972) speech event, the Instagram post event has clear boundaries which delimit the start and conclusion of the interaction, and are governed by particular norms for communication. The minimal component of an Instagram post event is the image, for without uploading an image, one cannot create an Instagram post. Optional elements include a caption (authored by the account owner) and comments (which can include content written by the account owner and other members of the site). Within the

[1] An example of the vitriol associated with breaking from beauty norms is seen in the video posted on YouTube by model, Em Ford: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WWTRwj9t-vU, and which gained coverage in the mainstream media (Rudolfo, 2018 https://www.elle.com/beauty/a15072954/no-filter-acne-instagram-trend/)

caption and comments, further optional elements of the Instagram post event include hashtags, emoji and tagged usernames. Certain components have additional networked affordances within Instagram, such as the hashtags and the usernames which connect the posts to other accounts and to other posts to which an Instagram member can subscribe. The Instagram post event is delimited by the boundaries of the post's template, which present the image, caption and comments within a single space. Figure 2 shows an example of a post event, including a photograph of two cakes, with the caption alongside the image. Underneath the caption, a comment appears, 'thats so impressive'.[2] The caption is as follows:

> Monday Guinness Cake
> #cakes #cake #chocolate #cupcakes#foodporn #food #baking #sweet#cakedesign #dessert #bakery #yummy#cakestagram #instafood #cakesofinstagram#delicious #cakeart #cookies #pastry #birthdaycake #foodie#coffee #desserts #instagood #love #patisserie #bake #instacake #coffeeshops.

Figure 2. Instagram post event showing an image, caption, comments and likes.

Post events will then appear within the Instagram member's profile and are distributed into the newsfeed for the followers of particular accounts or hashtags. As Figure 3 shows, when the post event appears in the context of the member's profile, the image is shown (rather than the caption or comments) and is the link by which the viewer can then access the post event in its entirety.

[2] All quotations from the Instagram posts are verbatim. Spelling and punctuation have not been corrected.

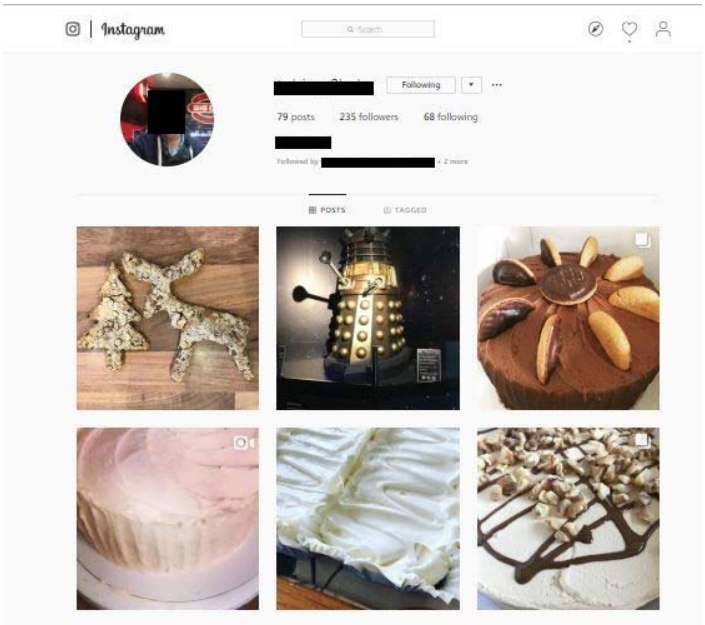

Figure 3. An Instagram member's profile, showing six post events in context.

Moving to the Instagram post event as a unit of analysis is important for a pragmatic analysis of images such as the ugly selfie. First, the meanings conveyed by the image need to be interpreted in line with caption which is provided by the Instagram member and in line with the comments that respond to the post. Second, the different components of the post event may each contribute to the interpersonal construction of self-denigration, where the creator's assessment of the '#uglyselfie' in the caption may be more or less congruent with the evidence offered in the image and responded to by the audience in the comments that follow.

3. Methods

3.1 Data collection

The data for this study was collected from Instagram using Netlytic (Gruzd, 2016), which was a tool that collected the verbal content of publicly available Instagram posts, along with a link to the original, publicly available post in its entirety which can be viewed within Instagram. At the time of the data collection in June 2018, Netlytic also collected the comments appended to each post (although this service has since ceased). The data collected from Netlytic thus included the caption (containing a minimal verbal expression of the hashtag #uglyselfie) and optional forms of response such as 'likes' and comments. One thousand entries were collected in June 2018. The mean number of likes for each post event

was 57, with a range of 3-2534. The mean number of comments for each post event was three, with a range of 0-43. Disregarding posts that had been deleted or where the captions were not in English left a total of 226 post events. In order to check whether the content of this dataset was representative of post events containing #uglyselfie, a second set of 1000 posts was collected three months later, in September 2018. The captions in the posts in the second set of data were found to be consistent in content with the original, smaller dataset. However, by September 2018, Netlytic no longer collected the comments appended to an Instagram post. In order to analyse the post event in its entirety, the analysis and results reported in this paper concentrate only on the smaller, original dataset where the comments to the Instagram posts were also collected.

Netlytic does not collect the images from Instagram posts. Analysing images also requires careful ethical consideration, for although it may be possible to observe selfies that are posted on publicly available sites, the rights to *reproduce* an image are retained by the image-taker. Selfies contain personally identifying information (such as a person's face), and so further choices regarding the anonymity of images must also be considered when they are reproduced. The ethical decisions relating to the images in the data I used proceeded in two stages. First, the images for each Instagram post were accessed separately from the data collected from Netlytic, using the NCapture function in NVivo, which views publicly available online content in context and does not require separate archiving of the image. The features of the image, caption and comments were then annotated within NVivo. Second, for the post events which are analysed in detail and where the images are reproduced in this paper, I contacted each post's account owner using the Instagram messaging service and gained their written consent (by further email correspondence) to reproduce their images. I gave each account owner the option to have the visual content of the image anonymised, and where this was requested, I blurred out the person's face. As the analysis involved features of the facial expression (such as eye gaze), where consent was granted, in this paper I reproduce the images showing the person's appearance without obscuring these elements.

3.2 Data analysis: Coding scheme and protocols

Each component of the Instagram post event (that is, the image, the caption and the comments) was coded for their contribution to the self-denigration in the interaction. For the analysis of the visual content of the images, an annotation manual was first prepared in line with recommendations for best practice (Fuoli, 2018). Establishing which features should be the focus of a visual analysis of self-denigration is not straightforward and is to some extent

dependent on contextual norms for assessing which factors might be considered of positive value and therefore open to devaluation. In order to establish what features of selfie-taking might be regarded as resources for positive self-presentation, I surveyed the first 25 online guides returned from a Google search for 'How to take a good selfie'. There are limitations that the choice of search engine inevitably imposes on the selected material. However, such a search reflects the ways in which a lay person might access such advice and therefore provides a useful start point to evidence the visual norms of selfie-taking. I coded each guide thematically for the topics that were the focus for advice. The topics included recommendations about the contextual setting and props that might be best included in the content of the portrait. Other advice in the guides concerned the factors typically associated with the interpersonal meaning of images. These included prescribed facial expressions such as eye gaze (direct to camera), eye brows (neutral) and mouth position (smiling or pout). Further advice focused on the mediated aspects of selfie-taking, such as what camera-angle should be used (to be taken from above) and what kinds of editing effects (specifically filters) should be used. A summary of how frequently these factors were mentioned within each set of guides is given in Table 1.

	Selfie guides (*N* = 25)	
Feature	**Count**	**% of guides**
Camera angle	20	80%
Context/setting	12	48%
Eye gaze	15	60%
Mouth expression	12	48%
Use of editing effects	10	40%

Table 1. Visual factors prescribed in advice on 'How to take a good selfie'.

A further rationale for focusing on the visual features recommended in these guides is that they provide an integrated account of the resources for interpersonal meaning that have been previously studied separately in different approaches to multimodality, where features related to facial expression had each been studied previously in pragmatic scholarship and the features relating to the mediated processes of producing a selfie (e.g. camera angle and filters) have been studied within social semiotics.

Based on the factors in the selfie guides and in the research literature, each image was analysed according to the following visual factors, where the subcategories of each were developed inductively from observation of the data.

Content and setting

- The number of persons shown in the image.
- The gender of the persons shown in the image.
- Setting which indicated additional selfie genres, (bed selfies, group selfies, pet selfies, fitness selfies, driving selfies, mirror selfies).

Mediated factors

- Camera angle (taken from above the person, level with the person, or from below the person)
- Use of Snapchat filters (beautifying filters, such as the 'cat', 'dog', 'halo' and 'butterfly crown' or 'ugly filters', such as the 'big eyes, big mouth', 'green sick face')

Facial Expression

- Eye gaze (direct to the camera, looking to the side, upwards, down or shut).
- Eye brow position (neutral, raised or frowning)
- Mouth expression (smiling, neutral, down-turned, pouting, snarling, tongue sticking out)

All images were analysed by the author of this paper. A subset of 20 percent of the data, consisting of a random selection the images was further analysed by two additional research assistants, neither of whom was trained in linguistics but both of whom were members of Instagram. Each decision for the inter coder reliability was reviewed by the paper's author. The overall strength of agreement calculated using Krippendorff's Alpha was 0.80, which is regarded as the lower threshold for between substantial and perfect levels of agreement (Landis and Koch, 1977). However, within particular categories of analysis, the levels of agreement varied, reflecting the inevitably subjective nature of interpreting the different aspects of the images. The individual levels of agreement for these categories are reported within the results section. The reported results are the distribution of the features after individual cases of difference were reviewed and agreement was reached.

4. Results

4.1. Persons and content

The images that were categorised with the hashtag #uglyselfie were somewhat heterogeneous in their content. A summary of the content is given in Table 2. As these results show, the majority of the images are of people, usually one person (rather than a group selfie) and more often a female person than a male person.

Number of people	Count	**%**	**Gender of people**	Count	%
One person	192	85%	One person - Male	61	27%
			One person - Female	131	58%
More than one person	25	11%	All male group	7	3%
			All female group	6	3%
			Group of male and female persons	12	5%
No people	9	4%	NA	-	
Total	**226**			**217**	

Table 2. Content of the images in the #uglyselfie posts

The content of the post showed people in a range of situations, which signalled a number of additional types of selfie. A summary of these types of selfie, as inferred by the context shown in the image is given in Table 3.

Image context	**Count**	**%**
Decontextualised background	136	63%
Group selfie	25	12%
Fitness selfie	16	7%
Pet selfie	12	6%
Bed selfie	8	4%
Driving selfie	7	3%
Mirror selfie	7	3%
Travel selfie	6	3%
Total	217	100%

Table 3. The visual contexts which are shown in the ugly selfies

As the results show, the most frequent type of representation was to show a person on their own in an unidentifiable background, in line with the findings of earlier more general studies of selfies in Instagram (Veum and Undrum, 2018). However, a range of other types of images occurred less frequently, such as fitness selfies, selfies with pets, bed selfies, driving selfies, mirror selfies and travel selfies where the background included a tourist destination or landscape. The strength of inter coder agreement for this category of analysis according to Krippendorff's Alpha was 0.66, which is within the good to substantial strength of agreement (Landis and Koch, 1977).

4.2 Camera angle and filters

In terms of the 217 images which contained people, the camera angle was used in a various ways: with the position of the camera level with the person shown in the image, below the person's face, or above the person's face. A quantitative summary of the frequency of the camera positions is given in Table 4. The strength of the inter coder reliability for the analysis of camera angle according to Krippendorff's Alpha was 0.58, just below the boundary for substantial agreement, and the lowest of the levels of agreement for all the categories in the analysis. This reflects the scalar nature of the camera angle, where differences in coder agreements arose when the camera was only slightly above or below the person's face.

Position of the camera	**Count**	**%**
Level with the person	117	54%
Below the person	63	29%
Above the person	37	17%
Total	217	100%

Table 4. Frequency of camera positions used in ugly selfies

Snapchat filters occurred in 12% (n=26) of the images. This included flattering filters such as the 'cat', 'dog', 'halo' and 'glasses' filter. No filters that produce non-flattering effects were observed in the data.

4.3 Facial expression

4.3.1 Eye gaze. In the 217 images which showed people, the direction of the eye gaze varied. A summary of the different directions of eye gaze is given in Table 5.

Eye gaze	Count	%
Direct to camera	157	72%
To the side	24	11%
Upwards	17	8%
Eyes closed	8	4%
Looking down	8	4%
Eyes obscured	3	1%
Total	217	100%

Table 5. Direction of eye gaze in ugly selfies

As these results show, the majority of the images of people (72%) showed the person looking direct to the camera, whilst other directions of eye gaze such as to the side, upwards, downwards of having closed eyes occurred much less often. The strength of the inter coder agreement for this category of analysis according to Krippendorff's Alpha was 0.72, within the substantial to perfect range.

4.3.2. Eye brow position. Eye brow position could be observed in 196 of the images of people. A summary of the different types of eye brow position and the frequency with which they occurred in the data are given in Table 6. As the results show, the majority of the images showed a person with neutral eye brow positions, raised eye brows occurred half as often and frowning eye brows occurred infrequently. The strength of the inter coder agreement for this category according to Krippendorff's Alpha was 0.82, within the near perfect range.

Eye brow position	Count	%
Neutral	121	62%
Raised	61	31%
Frowning	14	7%
Total	196	100%

Table 6. Frequency of the eye brow positions found in ugly selfies.

4.3.3 Mouth expression. In the images which showed people, the mouth was positioned in a variety of expressions. A summary of these positions and the frequency with which they occurred in the data is given in Table 7. The strength of the inter coder agreement for this category according to Krippendorff's Alpha was 0.82, within the range for near perfect agreement.

Mouth expression	Count	%
Smiling	63	29%
Neutral	55	25%
Pouting	25	12%
Open	25	12%
Downturned	22	10%
Pursed lips	15	7%
Tongue out	12	6%
Total	217	100%

Table 7. Mouth expressions which occurred in the ugly selfies.

As these results show, the most frequent mouth expression was the smile (29%, n=63). Other mouth expressions present in the data included a neutral position (25%, n=55), a downturned mouth indicating stronger sadness, along with expressions associated with anger, forms of impoliteness like sticking out the tongue and other expressions such as pouting.

4.4 Verbal analysis of the caption

In addition to the image, the verbal components of the Instagram post event were also a resource through which the selfie-taker might express self-denigration. Because the data was collected by means of a hashtag search, each image was accompanied by a caption which contained at least the hashtag, #uglyselfie. Given the negativity of 'ugly' as an evaluative modifier, the hashtag alone can be considered as self-denigration. However, the hashtag was not the only verbal content provided by the post creator in the caption. The caption could include further self-deprecation where the selfie-taker belittled the selfie or an aspect of their identity:

(a) #unflatteringselfie #uglyselfie

(b) I'm ugly and I know it #uglyselfie

Other captions embedded the #uglyselfie hashtag along with evaluation that mixed self-denigration with self-praise. An example of this includes the use of positive evaluation, which in the following example the selfie-taker's description of their teeth as 'shiny' and the hashtags, #cute, #pretty and #cutegirls:

(c) My shiny teeth and me #chipskylark #crimsonchin #timmyturner #thefairlyoddparents #nickleodeon #smile #pretty #girlswithpiercings #uglyselfie #dimples #cutegirls #cute

In other captions, the verbal content provided evidence for the self-denigration as an account of some kind of trouble,

(d) Still sick #sick #flue #ill #selfie #uglyselfie #stillinbed #bedselfie #nomakeup #sickface #ihatethis #Mondayblues #shittymonday #mondayselfie #mondaymood

Lastly, a further set of captions included the hashtag '#uglyselfie' along with a greeting, including national events (International Women's Day, Valentine's Day) and personal greetings, such as birthday wishes:

(e) Happy Birthday ya belter #birthday #sister #party #perty #ugly #uglyselfie

A summary of how the #uglyselfie hashtag in the caption was combined with different verbal content is given in Table 8.

Verbal expressions of self-denigration	Percentage	Count
#uglyselfie + further self-denigration	39%	87
#uglyselfie + 'trouble-talk'	27%	62
#uglyselfie + self-praise	27%	62
#uglyselfie + a greeting	7%	16

Table 8. Summary of the #uglyselfie and other verbal content in the captions

4.5 Responses to the 'Ugly Selfie': Comments

The second verbal element within the Instagram post event is the comment thread, where the selfie-taker and other members of Instagram might make further evaluation of the selfie or the person shown therein. In this data, there were various responses found in the comment threads. This included making no response at all, offering a face-enhancing response, a face-threatening response, or an ambiguous response to the image and caption (such as laughter which might be either face-enhancing or face-threatening). Examples of each type of response are given in Table 9.[3]

[3] As the illustrative examples given here suggest, there are further possibilities for upscaling or down-grading the rapport effects in question. For, example, to agree with a person's negative assessment as 'how you normally look' might be taken as increasing the face-threat by implying a longer, ongoing negative evaluation that extends beyond the Instagram post in question. As the relative upscaling or downscaling are somewhat difficult to quantify, these

Face-enhancing strategies	**Examples**
Disagree with the negative self-assessment	Not ugly
Offer a compliment	You look so nice! Gorgeous Flawless Sexy Cutie
Express a shared experience	SAME Been there! We all do
Offer empathy	Aww that sucks! Feel better soon
Face-threatening strategies	
Agree with or offer a comparably negative assessment	That's how you normally look Wig's on crooked dude You look constipated
Ambiguous strategies	
Laughter	Lol Haha

Table 9. Types of responses to the self-denigration in comment threads

A quantitative comparison showed that 93 post events (42% of those in this dataset) did not contain any response. Only a small proportion, five percent (n=10) contained comments which agreed with the negative self-assessment made either in the caption or the image. The remaining 106 post events (over half the dataset), included responses which were face-enhancing in nature. Within this category, compliments were the most common type of response, occurring in 82 of the post events. Other types of face-enhancing strategies such as expressing empathy or a shared experience occurred in 14 of the post events. Laughter was much less frequent, and occurred in 24 of the post events. The types of face-enhancing and

effects are not reported in the quantitative overview but instead are included in the qualitative discussion that follows in section X.

face-threatening responses observed in the data are interpreted as such based on the interactional context in which they occurred.[4]

In summary, the analysis of the visual and verbal features of the Instagram posts suggests a complex picture. Many of the captions were more than a simple evaluation of the image as an 'ugly' selfie and contained other contextualising content which suggested the presence of the different types of self-denigration strategies used by the selfie-taker. This included prototypical self-deprecation and 'trouble talk'. Many of the visual features might be expected to convey positive evaluation of the selfie-taker, whilst others are recognised as typically carrying more negative evaluation (such as a mouth position showing sadness or an eyebrow raise suggesting sarcasm). The large number of face-enhancing strategies that occurred in the comments suggests that the self-denigration as it is constructed in ugly selfies remains an interactionally 'safe' option, but there are important differences in the types of responses which suggest that compliments, humour, empathy and criticism were all possible interpretations by the audience of the negative assessment in the caption. To further understand self-denigration, the relationship between the visual and verbal resources within the Instagram post events needs to be considered as an integrated whole. This points us towards the ways in which the multimodal ensemble of the Instagram post can convey mixed messages which underpin the different subtypes of self-denigration.

5. The subtypes of self-denigration found in the Instagram post events

The ways in which the visual and verbal resources were combined in Instagram post events show how the relational strategies of self-denigration documented in conversational contexts are reproduced in photo-sharing practices. This includes prototypical self-deprecation and self-deprecation as a form of trouble talk. In both cases, the image is used as evidence against which the audience can assess the selfie-taker's claim that the image is an 'ugly selfie'.

[4] It is possible that some of these features may be used for further rapport effects, for example where a compliment is offered ironically, or where an insult functions as a form of in-group solidarity. This more nuanced interpretation of the data would require additional participant-centred interpretation that was not available from the 'screen-based' (Bolander and Locher, 2014) methods I used in this study, but would of course be a further next step for future research.

5.1 Prototypical self-deprecation

The mixed messages which typify prototypical self-deprecation in offline contexts are also found in multimodal communication such as selfies, where the negative assessment of the '#uglyselfie' was not supported by the contextual evidence provided by the image. In these images, the visual features might be interpreted as prompting positive evaluation, for example the camera angle or filters might be used to create a flattering effect, or the facial expression might convey positive affect (e.g. smiling), and incongruent with the negative evaluation in the caption as an 'ugly selfie'. In Figure 4, despite the evaluation in the caption of the image as an 'ugly ass selfie' and the hashtag #uglyselfie, there is nothing about the image itself that is in line with the negative assessment. Instead, the visual aspects of the image are used to comply with beauty ideals: the selfie is taken with the camera level to the selfie-taker (as judged by the coders in this project) and a flattering filter has been added to enhance the eyes. In terms of facial expression, the selfie-taker is looking directly at the camera, the eye brows are neutral and the mouth expression is smiling.

Figure 4. Selfie showing image-text incongruence

There is evidence in the comments within the post events that the recipients interpreted the image as incongruent with the selfie-taker's verbal evaluation of the image as 'ugly'. The comments include denials of the self-deprecation and compliments which boosted the quality face of the selfie-taker by praising her appearance. In the case of the image shown in Figure 4, the comments begin with the denial combined with a compliment 'Not ugly at all, beautiful [flames emoji]'. This pattern is also found in many other examples in the data, which included denials such as 'you're not ugly' and compliments such as 'beautiful', 'gorgeous', 'sexy', 'cool gallery!!!', 'Stunning'.

5.2 Self-deprecation as 'Trouble talk'

In other cases, as in conversational forms of self-deprecation there may be contextual evidence that is in line with the negative assessment given and which legitimizes the claim that the selfie was 'ugly'. In these cases, the image was used to contextualise the nature of the ugliness that is constructed, for example by depicting some kind of difficulty or trouble with which the selfie-taker was contending (showing the selfie-taker looking tired, ill or injured). In Figure 5, the selfie-taker displayed the scar and bruising after receiving surgery, which contextualises the '#uglyselfie' hashtag as the result of illness. The assessment of the selfie as 'ugly' is further expanded in the caption within the post event:

> So, haven't posted in a few , because this happened! Not the best picture to post, but its real life! I had my AICD implanted on Thursday 11/28 and will be recovering for the next 6-9 weeks. Although sore. I feel ok. I Thank Jesus for guiding my surgeon's hands,the nurses and anesthesiologist and Electrophysiologists who did my surgery and take care of so many others like me!! My ejection fraction was down to 15%...I could have (and am still at risk for) sudden cardiac death, and now, with this, I have a chance to live longer. I FEEL SO BLESSED!! #PraisetheLord #Blessed #Godisgood #Reallife #LovetheLord #Heismystrength #uglyselfie #heartsurgery #Notasbadasitlooks

In the caption, the negative assessment of the '#uglyselfie' is embedded in a narrative which also contains a rich range of evaluation which both expands the negative assessment and mitigates the 'ugliness'. For example, the selfie-taker begins by evaluating the image itself negatively as 'Not the best picture to post', then legitimises the motive for posting, 'but its real life!' Further balance between the trouble and mitigation of the negative assessment follows in the evaluative comparators found in the caption ('Although sore, I feel ok' and 'I could have and am still at risk for sudden cardiac arrest and now, with this, I have a chance to live longer'). Likewise, the hashtags contain self-deprecation of the '#uglyselfie', the mitigation, '#notasbadasitlooks' and contextualising information about the nature of the trouble #heartsurgery and legitimizing claims, #reallife.

Figure 5. Example of 'trouble' shown in an ugly selfie.

Other examples of 'trouble' that were depicted in the Instagram posts within this study related to external problems, such as more minor physical injury, mundane issues such as tiredness, travel disruption and technical errors relating to selfie-taking, such as too much light exposure within an image or mis-timing of a selfie-timer. In these cases, the images serve to contextualise the 'ugliness' in a way that is similar to the 'trouble-talk' described in conversational studies. The kinds of responses that are included within these types of self-deprecation in Instagram are also similar to those found in earlier studies of conversational data. There were no examples in this data where the self-deprecation was denied, but rather

the responses included empathy, 'Feel better soon!' appeals to a shared experience, 'Big hugs! I know how this feels'.

5.3 Self-deprecation reframed as self-praise

The multimodal analysis of the Instagram post events also brings to light new types of mixed messages where the self-deprecation is recontextualised as self-praise. This occurred in the fitness selfies that were also categorised with the hashtag #uglyselfie. In these images, at least some of the visual features prompted evaluation which was simultaneously negative according to beauty ideals (e.g. a person shown sweating, dishevelled hair and no cosmetics) but positive when interpreted as the outcome of physical exercise. In these images, the person was always shown wearing some kind of fitness attire suitable for exercise (usually, although not always at a gym). This visual contextualisation frames the physical appearance of the selfie-taker as evidence of hard work and therefore praiseworthy rather than troublesome or negative. In terms of a mixed message, the reframing of a negative attribute as a positive outcome is typically also expanded by further information in the caption which gives details of the physical activity undertaken by the selfie-taker.

In the example given in Figure 6, the visual content shows the person somewhat sweaty and dishevelled (and therefore at odds with beauty ideals), but also smiling and looking directly at the camera (and hence conveying positive affect). The narrative in the caption further contextualises the achievements of the selfie-taker and offers the story as positive encouragement to others as a form of 'fitspiration' (Tiggeman and Zaccardo, 2018). The negative assessment of the '#uglyselfie' is positioned as the resolution to the problem ('I put everyone ahead of me, tried to do too much') and is embedded in a statement that the ugly selfie 'is to encourage' the audience to follow suit, leading to an evaluation of future self-improvement, to 'be the best you can be'.

> Hey, mamas! It took me years to get back to working out. I put everyone ahead of me, tried to do too much, and basically said fitness was for the other woman.
> This #uglyselfie is to encourage you. It's not too late to carve out time to take care of the one who takes care of everyone else (That's you, by the way). Take a walk, buy a workout dvd, dust off the bike, get that pile of laundry off the treadmill (you know who I'm talking to) and #getyoursweaton . You'll never regret being healthy. #over50fitness #ilovezumba#startsmalltoday It's not about looks, or trends. It's about self care so you are the best you can be.

Figure 6. Fitness selfie tagged with #uglyselfie

The positive evaluation of the image is seen in the specific types of compliment that are found as preferred responses in the comments within this type of post event, namely compliments which praise the selfie-taker's achievements and which offer specific advice to keep training. For example, in the responses to the image shown here, the comments included praise and encouragement, such as, 'You inspire me! Go girl!' 'Way to go! Good for the heart, mind and soul'. This was typical of the comments found in other similar posts, such as 'Good for you! Sweating on a Saturday' and 'Keep it up!'

5.4 Self-mockery

In contrast to the mixed messages that were generated by an evaluative incongruence between the image and the caption of the Instagram post event, other types of mixed messages were generated by different visual elements within the image itself. The types of mixed messages that arise from these image-internal incongruities are related to humour and irony, and are particularly associated with self-mockery. In the earlier discussions of

conversational data, a range of non-verbal cues for jocularity have been given such as, 'raised or lowered eyebrows, nodding, smiling, a markedly blank facial expression, and iconic displays such as winking' (Haugh, 2010: 2108). This suggests that while there is no single paralinguistic feature that signals a play frame, it is possible for visual resources (not just verbal content) to serve this function. The ugly selfies allow us to examine further how jocularity might be conveyed visually.

In the dataset of 'ugly selfies' there were image-internal mismatches between different aspects of the image that extend the forms of incongruity typical of jocular mockery. For example, there might be aspects of the image that prompted a positive evaluation, such as the person's appearance in stylish clothes and carefully applied cosmetics or the selfie might be taken against beautiful background scenery. In contrast, other aspects of the image might be expected to prompt a more negative evaluation of the selfie-taker's quality face. For example, the camera angle might be unflattering (taken from below the person), or the person might use a face expression that conveyed negative affect (such as a strongly downturned mouth, frowning) or use facial expressions that were found to signal irony in face-to-face interactions, such as the eye brow raise, a side-wards eye gaze or rolling their eyes. What is perhaps most striking about these images is that mismatch between the positive and negative aspects of the self-presentation is intensified in a number of ways. This might occur in how strongly the negative aspects of facial expression were performed, such as the extent of a downturned mouth or raised eyebrows. In other cases, the exaggeration of the 'ugliness' was achieved through using several (rather than one) facial elements, such as raised eyebrows combined with an eye gaze directed upwards and a downturned mouth.

The effect of this exaggeration is visual hyperbole, and is illustrated in Figure 7. The selfie-taker is shown looking to the side (rather than direct to the camera), with frowning brows, and an upturned upper lip, all of which is further exaggerated by the use of camera angle, where the image is taken from below the person's face. Taken in isolation, these aspects of image might be interpreted as negative evaluation (such as anger or frustration). At the same time, the selfie-taker is also shown as attractive, as indicated through wearing make-up. In the context of the post event, the incongruity and visual hyperbole is put to humorous effect when is matched with a similarly hyperbolic caption.

> I wanted to take an Ugly Selfie today. Luckily, I had just eaten something spicy and my nose was runny. Luckily, this long string of snot creeped out at the perfect moment to make this picture 'extra special'. Luckily, I love myself enough to know that no matter how awful this picture is... I'm still the sexiest I've ever been in my

> entire life. Cute selfies are too easy. If you're feeling ultra sexy and sleek today... maybe go ahead and post an ugly selfie. It's amazing how incredible you'll feel afterwards. Mega bonus would be laughing so hard in the process that you fart. I love you.....#uglyselfie #wokeasswoman #wokeaf #moveandshift #awakening #spiritualandproud #bonergraveyard

In this caption, the selfie-taker's narrative includes a three-fold repeated structure signalled by the repeated adverb, 'Luckily', the competing assessments from the selfie-taker, that as 'no matter how awful this picture is…I'm still the sexiest I've ever been in my life', the repeated use of intensifiers which create over-statement (such as 'ultra sexy and sleek', 'amazing how incredible you'll feel') and irony ('cute selfies are too easy'). The caption itself makes the humorous intent of the ugly selfie explicit, encouraging others to 'go ahead and post an ugly selfie….Mega bonus would be laughing so hard in the process that you fart', and in line with this, the responses in the comment thread clearly interpreted the post as humorous and as positive towards the selfie-taker. Evidence for this is found in the comments, which include multiple instances of laughter and praise, 'Def the best insta post today!!!', 'I know of no one more dope' and 'I freaking love you!!!'

Figure 7. Example of jocular self-mockery in an ugly selfie.

The mixed messages that arise from these types of images are similar to the jocular mockery described by Haugh (2010), but rather than using *lexical* exaggeration and incongruous imagery the selfie employs *visual* exaggeration and incongruity. Like the lexical overstatement and incongruity that signals jocularity documented in studies of conversational self-mockery, this visual over-exaggeration expresses 'too much ugliness' to be taken seriously and in this case, subverts the idealised norms of selfie taking. As the laughter in the comments posted in response to these images show, for at least some people, the 'ugly selfie'

of this kind is not to be taken seriously as a claim of self-denigration but rather as a source of humour.

The kinds of mismatches generated by the images demonstrate the complex ways in which Instagram post-events can carry illocutionary force. In some cases, the illocutionary force arises because of a mismatch between the evaluation prompted by the image and the evaluation prompted by the caption and in other cases from the image-internal mismatches. Typically, these incongruities draw on meanings that are also found in offline contexts (such as the raised eye-brow signalling irony) but combine them in new visual contexts which carry their own generic meanings.

The different types of mixed messages in the self-denigration also explain why these subtypes result in different kinds of responses from the audience. Evaluative dissonance in self-deprecation might lead to denial of the negative self-assessment (e.g. that the selfie-taker is not ugly), whilst the over-exaggerated expressions that characterise self-mockery in this data did not lead to denial of the negative self-assessment (here ugliness), but rather an interpretation of the self-mockery as humorous. Of course, it is possible that these inferences might not be made by all recipients of an image, but the responses in the comment threads found in this data suggests that they are interpreted in this way by at least some of the audience.

6. Conclusion and directions for further research

This paper is the first study of self-denigration as it is performed through the multimodal resources of selfie-sharing. I focused on a hitherto under-analysed but important and frequently used type of image, the so-called 'ugly selfie', as this is found on the popular image-sharing site, Instagram. Correcting the scant attention paid to 'ugly selfies' in earlier media scholarship, the paper has shown that the ugly selfies are complex and varied, and can be used to convey different types of self-denigration. These include self-deprecation and self-mockery, where the playful presentation of the selfie-taker projects a jocular interpretation of the post. I have argued that these multimodal forms of self-denigration rely on different kinds of mixed messages. In the context of selfie-taking, the mixed messages are part of a double discourse which on the one hand allows the selfie-taker to comply with the modesty maxim and minimize praise of self by belittling their appearance (by claiming that the selfie is 'ugly'), but on the other hand also enhance their quality face, either by taking an image that showed the taker complying with beauty ideals (refuting any asserted claim of 'ugliness'), recontextualising ugliness as evidence of physical fitness, legitimizing the claim on the basis

of some kind of trouble, or projecting the performance of ugliness as humorous. The evidence from the comment threads which respond to these ugly selfies suggests that self-denigration achieves largely positive relational outcomes, and that recipients use compliments, empathy, praise and humour to enhance the quality face of the selfie-taker.

The analysis of the ugly selfies placed the image within the context of the Instagram post event and so departed from earlier studies of self-denigration and from earlier pragmatic studies of Instagram. Moving to using the unit of a post event is particularly important, because the caption and comments found alongside the images provided evidence for the ways in which the mixed messages generated from the ugly selfies were perceived and further evidence for the distinctions between the subtypes of self-deprecation and self-mockery. The mixed messages conveyed through images are a new means by which visual implicatures are indicated, and suggest that selfies not only represent people (whether in a positive or negative light), but also can carry illocutionary force, (as evidenced by the interpretation of the selfie as humorous).

Conceptualising the mixed messages conveyed through ugly selfies as a signal for implicatures helps us develop a pragmatic approach to visual content which can be used in the study of many other kinds of images. Ugly selfies are by no means shared only within Instagram, but also proliferate in microblogging and social network sites (including Tumblr, Facebook and Twitter). These alternative types of self-presentation may have important social implications, for example, in sites that have specialist uses such as dating apps like Tinder and Match.com, or in so-called 'finstagram' (fake Instagram) accounts used to share 'inside jokes' with close friends. Moreover, as selfies continue to diversify into distinct subtypes, we might expect the contextualised inferences associated with these images to become increasingly sophisticated and to incorporate mixed messages of different kinds. Better understanding of the complex ways in which these indirect meanings are triggered and interpreted is crucial, given the impact that image sharing has on the ways that people manage their identity and interactions with others.

The multimodal approach to self-denigration in this paper opens up many further areas of inquiry more broadly within pragmatics and sociolinguistics. Earlier studies of conversational self-denigration found important differences in the ways that self-denigration was constructed and perceived across cultural contexts (see for example, Zare (2016)). The methods and results of the visual analysis in this dataset can now be used to explore whether the visual forms of self-denigration also vary across socio-cultural contexts, for example, investigating images found on sites that are typically associated with Asian communities such

as WeChat and Weibo. Self-denigration in conversational contexts has also been found to vary along gendered lines and exploring how the use of ugly selfies might be used to construct different gendered identities and interactions is a promising further avenue for research. This is important not only within pragmatics, but more widely within media studies where the scholarship on idealised selfies has critiqued the genre for the restrictive constraints this has placed on young women in particular. How far the use of self-mockery and self-denigration in ugly selfies can be used to resist these restrictions is of particular interest, especially in the light of the current campaigns by celebrity figures to critique such matters.[5]

The analysis in this paper has used the comment threads within the Instagram post event as a first step toward understanding the reception of self-deprecation and self-mockery. Further participant-centred analysis can now test the relational implications of these responses. For example, investigating how far the compliments which respond to self-deprecation and self-mockery are variously perceived as sincere or insincere will help refine our understanding of how interactionally 'safe' this kind of self-denigration might be for different groups of participants. This has implications for a number of disciplines, including psychology, where the assessment of self-deprecation may vary considerably according to clinical conditions such as body dismorphia, narcissism and autism. Further studies using a range of other participant-centred methodologies might usefully expand the empirical observation of the relational work that ensues from image-sharing such as the ugly selfies, for example, using experimental design to focus on particular aspects of the mixed messages in images, or using ethnographic methods to trace how the online contexts for sharing images are integrated within the wider, offline relationships in which participants interact.

The analysis of the ugly selfies from a pragmatic perspective demonstrates the field-shaping implications of the new kinds of data that are now available in social media sites and platforms. As more technologies incorporate and promote sharing images and audio-visual content, so we will need to continue to shift our concepts and methods accordingly. In this paper, I have shown how mixed messages can arise from images in different, but principled ways and that this can help us understand better how key relational strategies such as self-denigration operate. Given that it has been said that a picture is worth a thousand words, it is my hope that this study will open up many promising avenues of research for pragmatics, both in the analysis of selfies and beyond.

[5] See for example, the @I_weigh campaign and Be Real (https://www.berealcampaign.co.uk/)

6. References

Abidin, Crystal. 2016. "Aren't These Just Young, Rich Women Doing Vain Things Online ? Influencer Selfies as Subversive Frivolity." *Social Media and Society* 2 (2): 1-17. https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305116641342.

Adami, Elisabetta and Jewitt, Carey. 2016. Special Issue: Social Media and the Visual. *Visual Communication* 15 (3): 263-270.

Anderson, Monica and Jiang. 2018. "Teens' Social Media Habits and Experiences." Pew Research Center. Available at: http://www.pewinternet.org/2018/11/28/teens-and-their-experiences-on-social-media/

Androutsopoulos, Jannis. 2013. "Networked Multilingualism: Some Language Practices on Facebook and Their Implications." *International Journal of Bilingualism* 19 (2): 185–205. https://doi.org/10.1177/1367006913489198.

Attardo, Salvatore., Eisterhold, Jodi., Hay, Jennifer., Poggi, Isabella. 2003. "Multimodal markers of irony and sarcasm." *Humor - International Journal of Humor Research*, 16(2): 243-260.

Balakrishnan, Janarthanan, and Mark D Griffiths. 2018. "An Exploratory Study of Selfitis and the Development of the Selfitis Behavior Scale." *International Journal of Mental Health Addiction* 16: 722–36.

Bennett, Jessica. 2014. "With Some Selfies, the Uglier the Better." *New York Times*, February 21, 2014. https://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/23/fashion/selfies-the-uglier-the-better-technology.html.

Blitvich, Pilar. Bou-Franch, Patricia & Nuria Lorenzo-Dus. (2013) Identity and impoliteness: The expert in the talent show Idol. *Journal of Politeness Research* 9(1), 97-120.

Bolander, Brook and Locher, Miriam. 2014. "Doing sociolinguistic research on computer-mediated data: A review of four methodological issues." Discourse, Context & Media, 3: 14-26.

Culpeper, Jonathan, Michael Haugh, and Valeria Sinkeviciute. 2017. "(Im)Politeness and Mixed Messages". In *The Palgrave Handbook of Linguistic (Im)Politeness*, edited by Jonathan Culpeper, Michael Haugh and Daniel Kadar, pp.323-355. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Dayter, Daria. 2014. "Self-Praise in Microblogging." *Journal of Pragmatics* 61: 91–102. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2013.11.021.

Dynel, Marta. 2016. "'I Has Seen Image Macros!' Advice Animal Memes as Visual-Verbal Jokes." *International Journal of Communication*, 10: 660-688.

Forceville, Charles. 2005. "Visual Representations of the Idealized Cognitive Model of Anger in the Asterisk Album La Zizanie." *Journal of Pragmatics* 37(1): 69-88.

Forceville, Charles. 2014. "Relevance Theory as model for analysing visual and multimodal communication." In *Visual Communication*, edited by David Machin, pp.51-70. Berlin: De Gruyter.

Francesconi, Sabrina. 2011. "Multimodally expressed humour shaping Scottishness in tourist postcards." *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change* 9(1): 1-17, DOI: 10.1080/14766825.2010.521561

Fuoli, Matteo. 2018. "A Stepwise Method for Annotating APPRAISAL." *Functions of Language*, 25 (2): 229-258. DOI: 10.1075/fol.15016.fuo

Goffman, Erving. 1959. *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Anchor Books.

Gruzd, Anatoliy. 2016. Netlytic: Software for Automated Text and Social Network Analysis. Available at: http://Netlytic.org.

Haugh, Michael. 2010. "Jocular Mockery, (Dis)Affiliation, and Face." *Journal of Pragmatics* 42 (8): 2106–19. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2009.12.018.

Holmes, Janet. 1986. "Compliments and Compliment Responses in New Zealand English." *Anthropological Linguistics* 28 (4): 485–508.

Hu, Yuheng, Makikonda, Lydia and Kambhampati, Subbarao. 2014. "What We Instagram: A First Analysis of Instagram Photo Content and User Types." *Proceedings of the Eighth International AAAI Conference on Weblogs and Social Media*, 595-598.

Hymes, Dell. 1972. "Models of the Interaction of Language and Social Life." In *Directions in Sociolinguistics: The Ethnography of Communication*, edited by John Gumperz and Dell Hymes, pp.35–71. New York: Holt, Rhinehart & Winston.

Kim, Mary Shin. 2015. "The Complexity and Variability of Self-Deprecation in Korean Conversation." *Pragmatics and Society* 6 (3): 398–420. https://doi.org/10.1075/ps.6.3.04kim.

Kofoed, Jette and Larsen, Malene Charlotte. 2016. "A Snap of Intimacy: Photo-Sharing Practices among Young People on Social Media." *First Monday* 21. https://firstmonday.org/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/6905/5648.

Landis, J. Richard and Koch Gary G. 1977. "The measurement of observer agreement for categorical data." *Biometics* 33(1): 159-174.

Leech, Geoffrey. 2014. *The Pragmatics of Politeness*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Maíz-arévalo, Carmen. 2013. "Just Click 'Like'' : Computer-Mediated Responses to Spanish Compliments." *Journal of Pragmatics* 51: 47–67. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2013.03.003.

Machin, David, Caldas-Coulthard, Carmen Rosa and Milani, Tommaso. 2016. "Doing Critical Multimodality in Research on Gender, Language and Discourse." *Gender and Language* 10(3): 301-308.

Matley, David. 2018a. "'This Is NOT a # Humblebrag , This is Just a # Brag': The Pragmatics of Self-Praise , Hashtags and Politeness in Instagram Posts." *Discourse, Context & Media* 22: 30–38. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dcm.2017.07.007.

Matley, David. 2018b. "'Let's See How Many of You Mother Fuckers Unfollow Me for This': The Pragmatic Function of the Hashtag #sorrynotsorry in Non-Apologetic

Instagram Posts." *Journal of Pragmatics* 133: 66–78. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2018.06.003.

Page, Ruth. 2019. "Group selfies and Snapchat: From Sociality to Synthetic Collectivisation." *Discourse, Context & Media* 28: 79-92.

Placencia, María Elena, Amanda Lower, and Hebe Powell. 2016. "Complimenting Behaviour on Facebook Responding to Compliments in American English." *Pragmatics and Society* 7 (3): 339–65. https://doi.org/10.1075/ps.7.3.01pla.

Pomerantz, Anita. 1984. "Agreeing and Disagreeing with Assessments : Some Features of Preferred / Dispreferred Turn Shapes." In *Structures of Social Action*, edited by J. Atkinson, J. M and Heritage, 57–101. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Schnurr, Stephanie, and Angela Chan. 2011. "When Laughter Is Not Enough. Responding to Teasing and Self-Denigrating Humour at Work." *Journal of Pragmatics* 43 (1): 20–35. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2010.09.001.

Spencer-Oatey, Helen. 2002. "Managing Interpersonal Rapport: Using Rapport Sensitive Incidents to Explore the Motivational Concerns Underlying the Management of Relations." *Journal of Pragmatics* 34: 529–45.

Tabacaru, Sabina, and Maarten Lemmens. 2014. "Raised Eyebrows as Gestural Triggers in Humour: The Case of Sarcasm and Hyper-Understanding." *European Journal of Humour Research* 2 (2): 11–31.

Tiggeman, Marika and Zaccardo, Mia. 2018. "'Strong is the New Skinny': A Content Analysis of #Fitspiration Images on Instagram." *Journal of Health Psychology*, 23(8): 1003-1011.

Veum, Aslaug and Undrum, Linda Victoria Moland (2018) The selfie as a global discourse**.** *Discourse & Society* 29(1): 86 – 103.

Walkinshaw, Ian, Nathaniel Mitchell, and Sophiaan Subhan. 2019. "Self-Denigration as a Relational Strategy in Lingua Franca Talk : Asian English Speakers." *Journal of Pragmatics* 139: 40–51. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2018.10.013.

Wang, Ruoxu ; Yang, Fan ; Haigh, Michel M. 2017. “Let me take a selfie: Exploring the psychological effects of posting and viewing selfies and groupies on social media.” *Telematics and Informatics*. 34(4): 274-283. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2016.07.004

Yu, Changrong. 2013. “Two Interactional Functions of Self-Mockery in Everyday English Conversations : A Multimodal Analysis.” *Journal of Pragmatics* 50 (1): 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2013.01.006.

Yus, Francisco. 2018. “Identity-Related Issues in Meme Communication.” *Internet Pragmatics* 1: 113–33.

Zappavigna, Michele. 2016. “Social media photography: construing subjectivity in Instagram images.” *Visual Communication* 15 (3): 271 – 292.

Zare, Javad. 2016. “Self-mockery: A Study of Persian Multi-Party Interactions.” *Text and Talk* 36(6): 789-312.

Zhao, Sumin and Zappavigna, Michele. 2018. “Beyond the self: Intersubjectivity and the social semiotic interpretation of the selfie.” *New Media & Society* 20(5): 1735-1754.