



Ideal Self: How We Use Photography and Technology to Present and Optimize Ourselves

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"According to the Humanistic Psychologist Carl Rogers, the personality is composed of the Real Self and the Ideal Self. Your Real Self is who you actually are, while your Ideal Self is the person you want to be." (Ideal Self, n.d.)

Self-representation and self-optimization have always been a big part of our culture and showing your 'Ideal Self' towards others is engraved in human nature. With the emergence of highly connected networks and the connectivity of everyday devices, photography has become a conversational practice and the craving for presenting, comparing and idealising oneself has reached a new climax. "Just as the moving body is the platform for the smartphone, so the device is the picturing agency that motivates, justifies and disciplines the body's performance." (Frosh, 2016) Our lives and our bodies are becoming a carefully cultivated and consummated image of ourselves that is presented daily to a hazy and shifting circle of people, not knowing who will see or read it at all.

At the same time, the bar seems to be steadily raised as we are confronted with ideals from every corner of the planet. Superfoods from South America for a longer life, meditation practices from Asia for the peace of mind or productivity hacks from America for the most successful in us. In addition, self-optimization systems (S.O.S.) and self-quantification measures are prevalent in our modern-day society. In a world where everything can be tracked and analyzed, every inch of our life is becoming easily optimizable and there is a seemingly unstoppable race for the best in ourselves.

With this study, I want to analyze the role self-referential photography is playing in digital communication towards an increasing need for self-representation and self-optimization. As photography is more and more becoming a legit means of communication, communicational skills are becoming more about uploading the perfectly crafted image of oneself than to find the right words. The visual image seems even to slowly take over the written word in digital communication - or as Farhad Manjoo puts it in his article about our post-text future: "The thing you're doing now, reading prose on a screen, is going out of fashion." (Manjoo, 2018)

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