The London School of Economics and Political Science

**Taiwanese girls' self-portraiture on a social
networking site**

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Abstract

An increasing number of young girls produce contents in social media on a everyday basis for the opportunities to express, explore and connect. Public misunderstanding and concern are about whether girls are being narcissistic and vain. Academic works address how girls exercise agency while negotiating structure in the construction of their gendered adolescent identities. This thesis is situated in relation to our hopes and fears about girls' self-representation through digital media production, and examines the role that photographic self-portraiture plays in girls' social relations, personal and gender identity work.

The theoretical framework combines the perspectives of gender performativity and symbolic interactionism, supplemented by analyses of personal photography. This thesis chose as its case study the popular Taiwanese social networking site *Wretch*, and employed a mixed method of quantitative content analysis of 2000 self-portraits of teenagers to understand how they represent themselves, and qualitative online interviews with 42 girls aged 13-20 to learn about their relationships with self-portraiture.

The content analysis shows that most teenagers represent themselves in a gender stereotypical manner, while some adopt non gender-specific styles to represent themselves as friendly, suggesting that teenagers may use ideals about femininity, masculinity and sociality as shortcuts to present themselves in a positive light. Interview findings reveal how girls use camera technologies and the affordance of SNS for visual self-disclosure, which is important for the development of their interpersonal relationships. The findings also suggest that self-portraiture is not simply an act of photographing a 'reality' of the self, but of formulating self-image(s) and identity in the process of making self-portraits. In self-portraiture, girls are constantly confronted with the 'who am I' question, and construct and revise their biographies as they manage an array of audiences from different contexts all collapsing in one space. Furthermore, self-portraiture creates a distance between the 'I' and the 'me', allowing one to 'play' with self-image(s) and identity. It creates a space for the negotiation of ideals and anxieties, for experiments with different subject positions that may be socially or individually rewarding, and it is through these seemingly casual endeavours that one gradually works out their position in the social world. The thesis contributes to the scholarship on girls' media culture, and suggests current theoretical perspective be expanded in order to better understand different ways of 'doing girlhood'.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Young People and Social Media

Tia (16) is an outgoing girl who loves taking self-portraits. In her online album space on the social networking site 'Wretch', she describes herself as a 'self-portraiture madman. I just can't stop, what can I do?' In her online space are an impressive 485 self-portraits taken with her camera phone and digital camera, showing her studying, displaying her tattoo, making childlike faces, lying on her bed in pyjamas, hanging out with friends, talking on the phone, etc. On her album space, there are also photographs of her dance club, classmates and her acting as model for amateur photographers.

Cindy (17) lacks confidence in her appearance. She has three albums in her online album space: one of friends, another of close girl friends and the third a password-protected album that collects her self-portraits. She often does not update them for months at a time. Despite her seemingly lukewarm attitude towards posting self-portraits online, she spends a good deal of time on Wretch Album[1] viewing other girls' self-portraits, admitting that looking at self-portraits of 'beautiful chicks' online is her pastime, and that she aspires to look as good as they do.

Yuan (16) left her mother and abusive stepfather to live with her single-mother cousin. In her online space she posts photographs with friends, self-portraits of herself looking funny, cute and sexy; there are also self-portraits taken with her cousin and her niece. Her space is personalised to be pink overall, with a collage of her seven self-portraits as the background image. Her albums were initially open to public view; she recently limited viewing to those in her 'friends circle' on Wretch in order to protect her privacy.

Tia, Cindy and Yuan, like many other children and young people coming of age in the digital era, incorporate digital and social media into their everyday lives. Content

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[1] The capitalised word 'Album' refers to the Wretch space where the individual posts their photographs. The lower case 'album' refers to the individual album within the Wretch Album space.

creation on social media such as social networking sites (SNS), allows teenagers to express themselves, to explore themselves and to connect with others. A study of Taiwanese teenagers' media use by Fubon (2008)[2] reveals that they consider the computer and the internet to be the most important media in their lives. As they age and develop verbal and computer literacies, their new media activities change gradually from seeking entertainment (computer or online games) to emphasising various forms of social communication enabled by the internet, such as Instant Messaging (IM) chat, blogging and sharing audio-visual content.

1.2   A Day in the Life

It is 6 am, and 16-year-old A-mei is woken by her mother. She rushes to wash her face, puts on some light make-up while gobbling her breakfast so she can get a lift to school from her father. It is 07:20 when she gets to her classroom, and she barely makes it to the morning Math quiz. At 07:45, the 'Math little teacher' collects their quizzes. A-mei joins her friends to get ready for the morning rally. From 08:10 to 12:00 she sits through four classes, feeling bored and sleepy. She notices that a few of her girl friends are taking self-portraits with their mobile phones during classes, in order to battle the boredom. When the bell rings at 12:00 she feels reinvigorated. She and her friends head to the school cafeteria and discuss the TV show she missed the previous evening when she was at English cram school. At 12:40, during the siesta, her friend sneaks her mobile phone to A-mei, showing her the self-portraits she took the day before when trying on clothes at a department store. A-mei keeps the mobile phone under the table as she views the photos so the class 'discipline leader' does not see what she is doing. At 13:20 the bell rings and everyone gets up to prepare for the afternoon classes.

When the bell rings at 17:05, A-mei stretches, trying to get rid of the tiredness from sitting all day. She has dinner with friends at a food stand near the school, after which they hop on a bus and head to the Math cram class that starts at 19:00. Some of A-mei's classmates have boyfriends who pick them up on their motorcycles and take

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[2] Based on a national representative sample of 1,980 teenagers attending middle school and high school.

them to their part-time jobs in beauty salons or restaurants. A-mei's cram school is cramped and smells bad because of poor ventilation and students' sweat-soaked uniforms. Although A-mei appears to be taking notes diligently, her mind wanders and she begins to think about a boy whom she secretly admires. When the class ends at 21:00, A-mei waits impatiently downstairs for her mother to collect her. It is 21:35 when they get home, she showers quickly and gets ready to watch a popular variety show at 22:00. As well as watching the show she turns on the home computer, which is in the living room, logs into her Yahoo! IM account, and checks for updates on her Wretch and Facebook. At 23:00, when the show ends, A-mei gets ready to sleep, but realises suddenly that there is another Math quiz next morning...

The above fictional account is typical of a day in the life of a high-school student in Taiwan. The conservative culture that places high value on academic performance means that the education system imposes normative and competitive expectations on children and young people, and structures their lives around meeting these demands for academic excellence. It is not uncommon for teenagers to spend their weekday evenings and weekends in cram schools after 7 to 8 hours of intensive classes during the day. A typical day for a teenager in Taiwan would involve rising early to be at school at around 07:20 for the early morning session, which is given up to quizzes, make-up classes or quiet study. The day starts after a school-wide ritual of singing the national anthem and an address from the principal. A school day is composed of eight 50-minute sessions, with a lunch break and siesta[3] at noon. After school, many students attend cram schools.[4] Trapped by a highly disciplined education environment and intense adult supervision,

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[3] Almost all primary, middle and high schools in Taiwan impose a compulsory post-lunch siesta. It usually lasts around 30 minutes, and during this time one is asked to rest or nap with head resting on the desk. Talking or even quiet reading are not allowed. Students who do not want to nap have to secretly find their ways around this.
[4] According to Wu's (2009) national representative survey of elementary-school children in Taiwan, 70.7% attend classes after school on an average of 3.8 days per week, with the majority attending five days of cram school a week. A survey of 1,500 teenagers (12–18) in Taipei (Department of Cultural Affairs, 2000) found that 13.4% of teenagers attend talent schools, with more girls than boys, and more younger (12–15) teens than older teens (16–18). Around 40% of teenagers attend cram schools, with more junior high-school students than senior high-school students. In both age groups, teenagers who attend public schools and teenagers whose fathers have higher education qualification are more likely to be enrolled in these after-school classes.

teenagers often seek to develop social relations and engage in leisure activities through various media: mobile phone, internet, television, etc.

Taiwanese children's and young people's access to computers and the internet has become near universal. According to the report on the Taiwanese government's Digital Divide survey[5], conducted in 2011 on a national representative sample of the Taiwanese population aged over 12 years old, 99.6% of children and youth aged 12-20 have used computers, and 99.1% of these have used the internet (compared with the national average of 72%, and a closing gender gap of 73% males and 71% females). Most households with children attending school have home computers (96%), and 92% of these households have home access to the internet (national average 83%) (RDEC, 2011). In terms of time spent online, children and youth aged 9-15 spend an average of 1.46 hours online per week day, and 3.55 hours per weekend day (Huang, 2012).[6]

According to RDEC's 2011 'Digital Opportunities' report, based on the same sample, among the monthly communication activities engaged in on the internet by children and youth aged 12–20, 73% involve use of email, and 52% use of IM online (a proportion second only to the 21–30-year-old cohort). With regard to use of the internet for entertainment, 68% reported watching videos online (second to the 21–30 cohort), 63.6% reported playing games online (highest percentage among all age groups), and 57% reported listening to music or radio online (second to the 21–30 cohort). With regard to social networking and blogging, 64% had used SNS in the previous month (second to the 21–30 cohort), and 54% of the 12–20 group had updated their personal blogs or homepages in the previous month (the highest proportion among all age groups). These findings are consistent with the previous RDEC reports and reveal that children and young people are growing up in a media-rich environment. The interactive features of Web 2.0 have created what RDEC (2007) refers to as the 'digital divide 2.0', which continues to set those aged under 30 apart from the generation aged over 30.

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[5] Data collected in July-August 2011 through a telephone survey. The sample was 13,272 Taiwanese aged over 12 years old, of which 583 were aged 12–14 and 1,402 were aged 15–20.
[6] The questionnaire was administered to a national representative sample of 9,951 children and young people age 8–15.

Photo-sharing online has become popular among internet users in Taiwan. According to market research (IX Survey, 2011a),[7] more than half (53%) of internet users aged 10–79 reported sharing on SNS, 16% reported sharing on personal blogs, and 7% reported sharing on online albums,[8] suggesting that SNS may be replacing online albums if the posting of photographs is mainly for sharing and communicating with personal networks. Indeed, this change in how users share photographs is evident in the competition between Facebook and Wretch, which are the leading SNS in Taiwan. Wretch was the most popular social networking site, best known for its Album section, until Facebook caught up in 2010. In July 2011, Wretch was the second most popular SNS, with about 10 million users, and Facebook the most popular, with some 12 million users (IX Survey, 2011b). In terms of users' age composition, 18% of Wretch users are between 10 and 19, 30% between 20 and 29, and 51% are over 30 – similar to Facebook's user composition.

People's increased involvement in the creation of digital content has given rise to several trends and generated various cultures, self-portraiture (自拍 zìpāi) being one of these that is embraced particularly by young people. The literal translation of zì is 'oneself', and pāi means 'to photograph or to film'; when combined the term means 'to photograph or to film oneself'. Zìpāi in Mandarin is an umbrella word referring to mediated self-representation – any still image or video footage taken by oneself of oneself. Unlike the English term self-portraiture, which has a long history in art of representations of artists' identities, most famously exemplified by Rembrandt's self-portraits, the Mandarin term zìpāi was popularised by the rise of camera and video technologies. Earlier usages were based on the Japanese sù rén zìpāi - 'amateur self-portrait', referring to amateurs (mostly females) representing themselves in ways that were often sexually suggestive (Yeh, 2007). As camera phones and digital cameras have

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[7] Data collected in November 2011 through an online survey administered to 2,972 Taiwanese internet users aged 10–79.

[8] According to Fubon (2008), in 2008 almost half (49%) of teenagers active online used an online album. There are significant age and gender differences: 55% of teenagers aged 16–18 used online albums compared with 44% of teenagers aged 13–15. Twice as many girls (65%) as boys (33%) used online albums.

become widespread,[9] zìpāi has become more commonplace in the everyday lives of ordinary people and, depending on the context, can refer to different kinds of self-portraiture practice. A web search on Google Taiwan using the Mandarin term zìpāi (自拍) produces three kinds of results: sexual self-portraiture such as sex tapes or revealing self-portraits, self-snapshots taken casually in everyday life, and - less common - footage of young people's pranks or acts of bullying that are posted online to share or 'show off'.

This doctoral research studies the second kind of self-portraiture, the taking of snapshot photographs, which is commonly practised by teenagers and young adults using analogue cameras, digital cameras or camera phones. When digital content creation was gaining popularity, this kind of self-portraiture was called 'internet self-portraiture' (wǎnglù zìpāi), the internet prefix specifying where these self-portraits could be viewed – online, in the 'virtual world'. However, as the internet has become more integrated into everyday life and the online/offline distinction is diminishing, self-portraiture (zìpāi) is the general description used.

Superficially, self-portrait photographs resemble Print Club photo stickers (purikura)[10] in that images are instant, convenient and intimate. In purikura photo stickers, the subjects are often personal, such as good friends or couples, and the subjects are portrayed in close-up in order to fit the frame. Purikura stickers play an important role in females' peer relationships by demonstrating these relationships and because they are easily shared among friends (Okabe, Ito, Chipchase, & Shimizu, 2006). The popularity of Purikura is waning and being overtaken by affordable cameras, but a lot of

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[9] In 2007, 41% of children aged 12-14 and 59% of teenagers aged 15-20 had access to digital cameras, according to a survey administered to a nationally representative sample of 15,007 Taiwanese residents aged over 12 (RDEC, 2007). In 2008, 61.3% of 13–15-year-olds and 88% of 16–18-year-olds owned a mobile phone, according to a survey of 1,980 teenagers (Fubon, 2008). No more recent surveys of similar representative teenage samples were available, but it can be expected that mobile phone and digital camera ownership has increased.

[10] 'Purikura' is the Japanese abbreviation for 'print club'. Purikura is the instant photo sticker booth that allows users to customise photographs with frames, graphics, messages and a range of special features that 'beautify' the subject, such as lighter skin tone and bigger eyes. It originated in Japan in the late 1990s and has been embraced by young people in many Asian countries, particularly school-age girls. There are various smartphone applications for making purikura. For more information on purikura, see http://web-japan.org/trends/11_culture/pop120216.html

the traits related to self-portraits persist and it could be argued that internet self-portraiture is the digital descendent of purikura.

Internet self-portraits, like painted self-portraits, are diverse in their styles of self-representation. However, the term 'internet self-portraiture' is not neutral, partly because of its perceived association with problematic sensational content – such as the sexual or bullying zìpāi referred to above - and partly because the genre of internet self-portraiture was made more visible by early adopters who were usually young females who posed as cute or sexy in their self-portraits shared online. It is a loaded term that carries connotations of soft porn and/or hyper-cuteness. A browse through the girls' self-portraits section on *Wretch Album* (www.wretch.cc/album) tends to confirm this impression. It is precisely because of this impression of *Wretch* and young people's self-portraiture practices that many adults worry about children's narcissism and self-image, about their revealing too much of their flesh or of their private lives on the internet, and their being glued to the computer chatting to friends and strangers alike.

1.3   Beyond the Moral Panic

Anxiety and panic about young people's practices is not new. Every time a new medium, media content genre or innovative media application is introduced to the mass market, concerns and anxieties regarding its potentially harmful effects on this presumably incompetent and thus vulnerable group emerge and circulate in the press. The term 'moral panic' is used to describe overblown claims about and over-reactions to deviant social or cultural phenomena (Springhall 1998, as cited in Mazzarella, 2007). The term was first coined in Stanley Cohen's (1972) *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*, which studied the activities of UK mods and rockers alongside an analysis of media coverage of these two distinct youth subcultures. Cohen observed that the mods and rockers were not in themselves infamous, but that the 'stylized and stereotypical' (p. 9) reporting language pathologised them as if they were symptoms of social disorder.

Moral panics occur intermittently, and Critcher (2008) suggests seeing these panics as 'extreme instances of a wider process of moral regulation' (p. 100) that is continuous

and calls for reformation of the moral dimension as the new 'threat' to social order emerges. While these panics may appear innocuous and the product of genuine concern, they are basically ideological and are an attempt by the (often) elite/authoritarian to discipline those who deviate from the norm, are easily duped or are vulnerable (Walkerdine, 1997; McRobbie & Thornton, 1995). Drotner (1992) uses the term 'media panic' to explain why the young and the media are often picked on as the subjects of moral panics. She argues that the assumed technical competence of youth and the cultural independence enabled by the media are perceived as a threat to established power relations; hence the need to regulate, reinforce and reassert authoritarian positions. Films, comic books, television, popular music and video games have all become (and some continue to be) the subject of moral panics.

Media panic about new media includes the internet in particular. The Taiwanese press frequently misapplies the term 'otaku',[11] labelling the young as the 'otaku generation' (the obsessive, stay-at-home generation) or as 'otaku children', referring to their long hours of media use – especially internet use – and conclude that youth are being dominated by the media. For example, a leading Taiwanese newspaper, the *China Times*,[12] used the headline '"otaku children" indulge in the internet, the vice president expresses concern' (Lin, 2012) on its coverage of the Children's and Teenagers' Communications Rights Forum. Similarly, a press release on the '2009 Taiwanese Children and Online Gaming' report published by the Child Welfare League Foundation (2009) was entitled ' childhood lost in "the web",[13] and discussed online gaming only in a negative light relating to eyesight problems, children leaving home, internet addiction and sexual assaults. Reports by organisations and foundations interested in children's communication and welfare also tend to frame the issue from a normative, conservative

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[11] 'Otaku' (or 御宅族 yù zhái zú in Mandarin) is a Japanese term that originally referred to ' (typically) young men who spend most of their days and nights at home, at their computers, accessing, processing and distributing information about some very specific aspect of the world of television, music, movies or comic-books' (Tobin, 1998, p. 109)

[12] Despite its name, it is owned by a Taiwanese business and circulated in Taiwan (Republic of China).

[13] The title is a pun on two homophones. The Mandarin pronunciation of a term meaning 'lost in the "web"' (迷網 mí wǎng) is the same as that of the term '迷惘'(mí wǎng), which means being perplexed or lost.

perspective that mostly reflects adults' value judgments of the internet. For example, the large-scale study of 'Taiwanese Children and Teenagers' Internet Use and Self-Image' (Huang, 2012) found, among other findings, that use of SNS is positively correlated with greater concern about one's appearance and achievements, how one is perceived by others, and overall self-image. It also found that those who spend more hours online care more about their appearance and how they are perceived by others, but care less about their achievements. While the results can be interpreted in several ways – for example by exploring potential intermediate factors or recognising that risks and opportunities are linked (Livingstone & Helsper, 2010) – the report arrived at a familiar normative conclusion:

> These findings reflect that, as children and teenagers use the internet alone late at night, their thinking, judgment and determination may be weakened as they feel tired at night. Also, because they use the internet without parental guidance and discussion, they might easily adopt the framework of interpretation that is more in line with the hegemony of online content, that is, become more easily 'dominated' by the online content. (Huang, 2012, p. 10).

The negative conclusions imply a judgment that teenagers ought to care more for achievement than for sociality, reflecting the dominant cultural value in Taiwanese society.[14] The report refers to self-image and internet use in terms of simple causal relations, but does not consider children's and young people's competence at navigating online content. It also assumes that online content is homogenous and inherently bad. Public and media discourses such as these not only fail to understand the nature of

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[14] In a society strongly influenced by Confucianism, the expression 'to be a scholar is to be the top of society' captures how highly education is valued. Apart from school education, there are cram schools that help students with their exams, ranging from those in very early elementary school to graduate school entrance exams. So-called 'talent schools' are also popular, especially among middle-class parents of children in elementary school, and parents commonly invest a large proportion of the family's resources in children's education. Extracurricular activities reduce as children get older and are required to prioritise academic performance with the goal of entering a top high school or college. With such normative and conservative values concerning academic performance, students' choice of an educational or vocational track is often based not on their real interests, but on their grades. Those with good grades are expected to continue climbing the education ladder, while those with poor grades are encouraged to 'get practical' and attend vocational school. The emphasis on educational attainment places different pressures on students on the educational track to enter top schools and on those on the vocational track who feel inferior compared to their more academic counterparts.

youthful internet use, but also implicitly seek to evoke adults' nostalgia for their own childhoods, without taking into account changes in society and in the media landscape (Buckingham, 2000).

Livingstone (2009) describes moral panics over the use of the media as a scapegoat, ignoring more significant causes for concern, as a denial of the pleasure and agency of an assumedly inferior group (such as the working class or children), and as a justification for the reassertion of conservative, sometimes repressive, values. One of the media panics about the internet is related to young people's use of SNS and their potential encounters with sexual predation, bullying, etc. While these are real problems that should not be neglected, Thiel-Stern (2009) argues that the panics reported are problematic and demonstrate the traits summarised by Livingstone (2009) and mentioned above. Through systematic analysis of a random selection of 100 international news articles written in English about boys' and girls' use of MySpace, Thiel-Stern found that MySpace is construed as an objectionable site to which sexually assertive girls, violent boys and sexual predators flock. These sorts of news discourse, she concludes, reinforce the hegemonic understandings of femininity as either passive and helpless or actively becoming 'out-of-hand', and of masculinity as active and violent.

In a study that focused specifically on young girls, Thiel-Stern (2008) examined US press coverage of girls' use of SNS. She found that recent discourses on girls' visibility in a (virtual) public space are reminiscent of the moral panic in news coverage of the early 1900s regarding girls going to dance halls. The reporting in both cases adopts a patriarchal tone that implicitly links the public presence of girls (in physical and virtual spaces) and their sometimes overt articulation of their sexuality (i.e. morally corrupt dancing girls and girls who digitally share provocative images of themselves) to promiscuity. Also, not only is the benefit of SNS use neglected in favour of scandalous incidents, but the moral panic surrounding young people's use of SNS is bewilderingly connected to femininity, as if the public articulation of female sexuality is in itself something to be condemned. Her argument emerges in the debates on 'sexting' (a portmanteau term derived from the words sex and texting) and child pornography in the US. The term 'sexting' generally refers to the practice of sending/posting nude or semi-

nude photos of oneself or others. A nationwide online survey of young people in the US, conducted in 2008 by the National Campaign to Support Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, reveals that 20% of teens (aged 13-19) and 33% of young adults (aged 20-26) have photos of themselves for sexting. More girls have them than boys, but the gender difference in both age groups is no more than 5%. In at least eight US states, prosecutors have tried to halt such practices by threatening those who send or receive them with child pornography charges (Rubinkam, 2009). According to the results of a survey carried out by the National Campaign to Support Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, one in five US youths could potentially be prosecuted for child pornography offences, which in some cases would mean a gaol term and registration as a sex offender. In one contentious case, 12-year-old Marissa Miller was photographed at a party by a female friend, wearing her new training bra. The photograph was circulated to her fellow students' mobile phones without her knowledge or consent. She was threatened by the local District Attorney with prosecution for child pornography. For the girls the photograph was harmless fun devoid of criminal intent; for the prosecutor it was a case of a child posing provocatively, which constituted victimisation and criminalisation (Associated Press, 2009).

The cases of young people disseminating racy self-portraits on mobile networks or on the internet highlights societal concerns about media, decency, youth culture and young people's sexuality. Buckingham and Bragg (2004) argue that:

> Children's sexuality–or their knowledge of sexuality–may be becoming visible to adults in a
> way that it was not… in the recent past. It is not so much that children have suddenly
> become sexual, more that adults are now being forced to recognize the fact (p.4.).

As Thiel-Stern's earlier example of the dancehall shows, a hundred years ago a teenage girl might have sneaked out of the house late at night and headed to the dancehall in her favourite alluring dress hoping to have a good time. Nowadays, teenage girls may only want to share their new purchases with friends, as in the case of Marissa Miller, but end up being labelled child pornographers. While the question of what is the appropriate method for dealing with underage sexting practices is part of an ongoing debate, the authorities' draconian responses to something that teenagers perceive as fun and

innocuous has been rather heavy-handed. It seems to be another reflection of society's moral anxiety over young people's – and in particular girls' – public articulation of sexuality as enabled by the new media.

1.4   Media Effects?

Related to media panic is concern about the potential harmful effects of the mass media on young people, particularly around issues of young people's sexuality, ideals of beauty, body image and acceptance of gender stereotypes. In the context of online self-portraiture, one may wonder whether girls learn the self-representational styles and poses from (ideal) images of gender representations in the media; in other words, whether these are *effects* of exposure to mass media. It is true that the mass media are often considered to exercise a powerful influence in shaping their ideas of norms and standards (Field et al, 1999). However, it is no easy task to determine whether exposure to media content does lead to any media effects, negative or positive; and research in this area has been, for a number of reasons, characterised by vigorous debate. First of all, as Potter (2011) points out, the reason this area of studies remains unsettled despite the large body of mass media effects research accumulated since the 1920s may be because a precise and formal definition of a 'mass media effect' is lacking. Potter thus suggests a conceptualisation of four kinds of effects – 'gradual long-term change in magnitude, reinforcement, immediate shift, and short-term fluctuation change' (p. 896) – that may be useful for future studies. Secondly, there is the difficulty of measurement. It is not possible to demonstrate direct causal relations between media exposure and an audience's acceptance or internalisation of norms and values endorsed in the media – laboratory experiments in which other factors are controlled for are difficult to generalise across a broader population, and longitudinal studies cannot easily conclude that the media is the primary determining agent among other factors such as family, peers, school, social-cultural context, etc., leading to the acceptance of beliefs, as in the case of gender stereotyping (Kite et al., 2008; Reid et al., 2008).

As a result of definitional differences and challenges with measurement, studies that examine the correlation between media exposure and beliefs in gender stereotypes often yield contradictory results. Some find positive correlations (e.g. Huston et al. 1992; Morgan & Shanahan, 1997; Ward & Harrison, 2005; Tiggemann, 2006; Chang, 1998), while others find that only certain media content such as music videos (Borzekowskia, Robinson & Killen, 2000) are positively correlated with effects for some people, for example girls with low levels of social support (Stice, Spangler, & Agra, 2001).This leads to a conclusion that, as has been argued by Livingstone (2007), 'the media do harm some children, in some ways, under certain conditions' (p. 5).

Using girls' body images as an example, Holmstrom (2004) summarises three theoretical contexts of studies of potential media effects on girls' body images: Festinger's social comparison theory, Gerbner's cultivation theory, and Bandura's social cognitive theory. Holmstrom notes that inconsistencies in various methodological choices, such as definition of 'body image', types and length of media exposure, types of research design, age of participants and stimuli used in experimental studies, can result in different and conflicting empirical findings concerning media effects. She conducted a meta-analytical review of these studies and found very little relation between media and body image, suggesting that the media portrayal of the ideal thin body image may have little or no effect on female audiences. Botta's (1999) review of research on the effects of body image messages in the media and disturbance of adolescent body image also had inconsistent findings, which she attributes to the differences in theoretical approaches used to study the effects and also to differences in measurement. Yet, Hargreaves and Tiggemann (2004) found that exposure to thin-ideal commercials led to increased body dissatisfaction for girls, and that the size of the effect was greater than that on boys who were exposed to muscular-ideal commercials, implying that girls were more readily affected by such commercials than boys.

While it is not the central focus of this thesis to address media effects, there is one important finding in effects research that is relevant to the concern with girls' identity work via self-portraiture. While direct effects remain difficult to identify, studies are recognising the indirect or mediating effect of social-cultural factors in shaping how

young people respond to media messages. In studies of the combined role of peers and of media messages concerning appearance, Dohnt and Tiggemann (2006a; 2006b) found that, while exposure to media was related to the sampled girls' (aged 5 to 8) higher awareness of dieting and desire for a thin body, girls' perception of their peers' body dissatisfaction also predicted for dissatisfaction with their own bodies. They also found that girls who had more appearance-related discussions with their peers were less satisfied with their own appearance.

McCabe and Ricciardelli (2001) found that media, as well as male and female peers, were perceived to encourage adolescent girls to adjust their weight closer to the thin ideal, whereas boys did not perceive such pressure from their peers to tone their bodies to be more muscular. This was also observed by Sinton and Birch (2006), who found that family, peers and the media have a joint influence on body dissatisfaction among 11-year-old girls. Park (2005) further explored the interesting linkage between the influence of peers and individuals' body images. She found that reading beauty and fashion magazines had not only a direct effect on female college students' desire to be thin, but also an indirect effect – when one perceives the thin ideal to be prevalent in the mass media from reading magazines, one assumes that other people are influenced by and buy into such an ideal, which in turn reinforces perceptions of the importance of the thin ideal. Jones, Vigfusdottir and Lee (2001) found that exposure to magazines that contained appearance ideals only predicted increased body dissatisfaction for adolescent girls, not for boys, and that the relationship was weak, whereas adolescents' conversations with their friends about appearance – whether this consisted of negative criticism or positive or even neutral comments – was a strong predictor of adolescents' internalisation of appearance ideals.

These studies – although they reached varying conclusions about the effects of media exposure – do highlight the fact that girls are in general more prone to respond to messages communicated via the media and/or by other people about body ideals, and that peers play a non-trivial role in individuals' body image, directly through discussion and imitation or indirectly through the presumed influence of media messages on the

individual's peers. The latter insight is particularly relevant to understanding girls' impression management in self-portraiture, which is discussed in detail in Chapters 6 and 7.

As illustrated above, determining media effects can be complicated and requires careful examination of multiple factors. The strength of the effects research is that it unravels correlations and causality between variables, yet it has also been criticised for its psychological reductionism, problems with the design of lab experiments and the underlying causal logic of external institutions having effects on individuals (c.f. Livingstone, 1996). Furthermore, not all questions about an individual's relation with the media can be adequately addressed with a causal or linear approach, and this is increasingly the case in the age of social media when people interact with and via digital media, and play active roles in the reception and use of the media. Therefore, it may be more fruitful to revise the questions of media effects to be a different one – one that views the media as playing a constructive role, rather than a causal role – as Livingstone (2007) proposes: 'in what way and to what extent do the media images contribute, if at all, as one among several identifiable factors that, in combination, account for the social phenomenon under consideration?' (p. 11).

Some scholars, on the basis of work with young people, have argued against seeing the media as either completely positive or completely negative and unquestioningly assuming some effects. They advocate for the media as a cultural resource, with young people drawing intertextual elements from different media content for their ongoing process of identity construction. For instance, Buckingham and Bragg's (2004) study of 120 young people aged 9 to 17 found that the media function as resources from which some youth draw 'categories of self-definition around which to mobilize and negotiate, to claim as their own or disrupt' (p. 71). Similarly, Nayak and Kehily (2008) suggest that magazines are a cultural resource that young people 'talk with' and 'think with' (p. 135) in making sense of their gender identities.

This intertextual cross-referencing and use of media content is especially noticeable in youthful online production. Chandler and Young (1998) borrow Levi-

Strauss's notion of bricolage to describe youthful homepage production, arguing that it is through interaction –'inclusion, allusion, omission, adaptation and arrangement' (para. 16) – with cultural elements in the media that one constructs and reflects identity. Weber and Mitchell (2008) coin the term 'identities-in-action' to describe how 'like digital cultural production, identity processes are multifaceted and in flux, incorporating old and new images' (p. 27). This notion of 'identities-in-action' echoes Coleman's (2008) argument, in which girls' bodies are seen as a 'becoming' rather than as pre-existing beings separate from their surroundings. Coleman argues against using media effects to examine the relation between girls' bodies and media images, since 'effects' implies a binary opposition between the two as if they were 'subjects and objects which exist prior to their relationality' (p. 164), when in fact they are two co-existing entities whose relations are intertwined and 'bodies are experienced through images' (p. 164). She suggests that a productive thread of enquiry for feminist research, or any research interested in media effects and the body, should focus on how experiences with media images 'limit or extend the possibilities of becomings [of bodies]' (p. 175), so the enquiry should not stop at the point of deciding on negative media effects rather than being the place where analysis begins.

1.5   Evolution of the Research Question

In the first five years of the 21st century digital cameras were adopted by the early majority in Taiwan. This was the early phase of Web 2.0, when people started sharing user-generated content online. In 2000-2005self-portraits, among other content, started to proliferate in the online world, and young females' self-portraits became a phenomenon. Young adults, mostly college students, would post links to 'beautiful chicks' photographs on the 'Beauty' board of the largest BBS (Bulletin Board System) in Taiwan –ptt.cc– to share, discuss, or ask if anyone could identify the beauty and provide more personal information.[15] Among the websites where these 'beautiful chicks'

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[15] Photographs of handsome boys were also shared, but to a lesser extent.

photographs could be found, Wretch[16] and the since discontinued TaipeiLink were the main ones. Terms such as 'internet beautiful chicks' (網路正妹 wǎnglù zhèngmèi) and 'internet self-portraiture' (wǎnglù zìpāi) entered the public lexicon. There were some spectacular cases of young females who became micro-celebrities online because of their self-portraits, for example, those nicknamed 'Cherry', 'Little Fox'[17] and 'Dumplings'. Their self-portraits were characterised by the accentuation of physical beauty and revelations of the self in everyday moments – as if offering the spectators 'voyeuristic pleasure' (Mulvey, 1975). Many early 'internet beautiful chicks' were very aware of their status as famous beauties and made conscious efforts to maintain the appeal of their Albums.

This trend towards revealing one's personal life through the posting of self-portraits is puzzling in two respects. First, it took place against the backdrop of the growing popularity from the late 1990s of reality TV, which showed a growing number of mediated representations of ordinary people. Dovey (2000) comments on the 'confession media culture' and the public's reformulated sense of the public/private boundary, and asks why 'intimate revelation [has] become such a key part of the public performance of identity' (p. 1). Second, if we follow Mulvey's (1975) classic feminist critique that images of women in mainstream films were constructed as an erotic spectacle providing scopophilic pleasure for male spectators, then why do the 'internet beautiful chicks' continue to portray themselves in ways that conform to the perspective of the conventional male gaze, despite being 'armed with the tools of digital media' (Bird, 2011, p. 504)? In other words, when these young females have digital cameras and a voice on the internet – which supposedly empower them– why do they not produce alternative self-representations that are not based on 'objectifying' their 'spectacular' female bodies?

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[16] Wretch was founded in 1999 by a graduate student in Computer Science who set up the website in order to practise his technical skills. Its Album became the most popular among young adults, mainly because of the collection of young females' photographs.

[17] 'Little Fox' is an example of an 'internet beautiful chick' whose fame extended into the offline world. She became a news anchor for a TV channel in Taiwan and did some acting. Her Wretch album continues to be active, although many of the earlier self-portraits have been removed. See http://www.wretch.cc/album/sugarjocelyn

While this question reflects feminist concern about resistance through media production, on further analysis it does not yield constructive answers. The formulation of this question is problematic in several ways, mainly because of its assumptions. It assumes, on the basis of textual analysis, that females portray themselves to please a (male) audience. It does not consider the pleasure and meanings of self-portraiture for these female subjects. It assumes also that the audience interprets the self-portraits in a homogenous way and that (male) audience members invariably derive the same visual pleasure in viewing these self-portraits. Relatedly, whether the term 'objectification' is still relevant or constructive in the postfeminist culture is also contested (Gill, 2008). Furthermore, it assumes that with more control over the use of digital technologies females would produce 'authentic' self-representations that challenge commercially produced representations in terms of the portrayal of gender.

This last point reflects one of the wider optimistic expectations of the internet, that Web 2.0 technologies will allow greater participation and hence more democratic and resistant media production (c.f. Jenkins, 2006). However, studies show that whether participation will be transformative is not straightforward, and depends on complex factors. First, participation in Web 2.0 is at different levels, such as those of creators, spectators and inactives (van Dijck, 2009); not all contribute actively to content. Second, much production work takes place in institutional or commercial contexts where the power and structure inevitably influence or shape, if not limit, the work produced (c.f. Thumim, 2009a; Carpentier, 2011). Third, whether self-produced media work is appreciated depends on, for example, its quality and social relevance (Carpentier, 2009). Simply being participatory work does not guarantee the potential for transformation. Finally, self-representations such as self-portraits are produced mostly in leisure time, for individual purposes and meanings, which may or may not include the objective of challenging mainstream representations of gender.

There is another reason why the original question needs revision. In the second half of the first decade of this century, the price of digital cameras fell and image quality

improved, which led to the mass adoption of digital cameras and their domestication to suit personal photographic practices (see Section 1.6.1). Photographic self-portraiture was no longer perceived to be the practice only of the 'spectacular girls' referred to above, but became more widely practised by ordinary people and integrated into their everyday lives. Therefore, it is necessary to ask a different question: one that allows us to explore how self-portraiture is practised, the diverse meanings of self-portraiture for individual girls – ordinary or spectacular - and that acknowledges the personal value of their practices, even though they may not be the alternative, resistant practices that feminists hope to see at the collective level. The core research question is thus:

> How do girls practise self-portraiture online, and what role does this practice play in their identity work?

The question is formulated broadly, and thus is broken down in Chapter 2, following a discussion of the theoretical framework, into four sub-questions, and operationalised in Chapter 3 for the empirical research.

1.6 Contextualising Personal Photographic Practice

1.6.1 Development of personal photographic practice

This research conceptualises internet self-portraiture as a personal photographic practice that sits at the intersection of popular and amateur photography and of information and communication technologies (ICT). This section draws on the literature on personal photography and mobile communication in order to contextualise the practice of self-portraiture against the historical technological background.

The practice of personal photography did not become popular until the Kodak roll-film camera was introduced to the US mass market in 1888 by the American hobbyist George Eastman (Coe, 1973). Prior to that time, photography was a pursuit of the middle class and signified their symbolic class capital and cultural capital of appreciation of art and science, often using paintings as a model with which to align their aesthetic tastes (Burgess, 2007). The 'Kodak moment' at the turn of the 20th century and the slogan 'you press the button, we do the rest', redefined amateur photography. The technological

innovation of the camera broadened and segmented the market, transforming photography from a cultural practice of the hobbyist concerned with artistic value to a mass public practice for documenting special moments in everyday life (Murray, 2008). Kodak transformed 'what and who photography was for' (Burgess, p. 95).

From its entry to the mass market, Kodak advertised and promoted its products and services in national magazines, newspapers and trade journals. It encouraged mass take-up by suggesting possible users: tourists, sportsmen, bicyclists, men who went boating, animal lovers (Taylor, 1994) – a direct invitation to middle-class gentlemen to continue documenting their leisure pursuits. Kodak also used the stylish, smiling 'Kodak Girl' from 1910 as a sales icon that spoke directly to mostly middle-class women and encouraged them to keep a record of domestic life and especially of their children (Holland, 1997).

However, the idea of sitting or posing in front of a camera was not embraced by everyone. Early (portrait) photography in the mid-1800s in the UK involved lengthy exposure times and required sitters to sustain a pose or an expression for several minutes, giving rise to the expression described as the 'Victorian soulful look' (Holland, 1997, p. 116). Even when snapshot photography became possible, there was some uneasiness about being photographed by a strange little box. In order to reduce these concerns, Kodak 'masterminded' and 'engineer[ed] photographic consent' (Kotchemidova, 2005, p. 7) by giving instructions to professional photographers on how to lure customers into their studios, encouraging them to offer to take pictures in customers' homes, and associating the idea of photography with holidays and celebrations. Through a purposeful emphasis on special, pleasurable moments as photographic subjects, Kodak was able to naturalise the depiction of happiness in photos - the 'say cheese' smile - while other, more mundane domestic subjects were rarely captured on film (Coe, 1989).

The new role that Kodak sought to ascribe to photography was essentially what Bourdieu (1990a) calls a 'festive technology', which provided a means to 'solemnize' high moments in family and social life and served as an 'object of collective and quasi-ceremonial contemplation' (p. 26). At the same time, photography functions as a record

of social relations. People are not photographed as 'individuals in their capacity as individual, but [in their] social roles' (p.24). The act of taking snapshots can be in itself a way of experiencing an event, as in the case of tourist photography discussed by Sontag (1977). Photography, as a 'must-do' during important social and leisure activities, is instrumental not only in capturing the moment, but also and perhaps even more in allowing the collective inspection and reliving of moments that will never return. However, Slater (1995) points out that, despite the high value people give to personal photographs, as exemplified by the traditional family album, what really matters is knowing that they are there to be looked at should one want to do so, but that their role in family life is marginal. (We will see that in the case of digital imaging technologies this does not necessarily apply). Rubinstein and Sluis (2008) identify this as a paradoxical characteristic condition of snapshot photography: despite its ubiquitous role in family and social life, it is largely hidden from public view.

The advent of consumer digital cameras in the late 1990s and their popularisation in the early 2000s brought transformation in photography as a technology and as a practice (Murray, 2008). Although digital imaging technologies were developed in the early 1990s, Rubinstein and Sluis (2008) argue that this did not bring dramatic changes to photographic practices, but enabled a gradual shift, fitting digital imaging technologies (such as scanner, computers and printers) to existing practice with analogue cameras, for example by making prints of photographs using colour printers rather than in the photographic darkroom. However, the launch of the first digital consumer camera by Casio in Japan in 1995 (Tatsuno, 2006) was a new page in the history of personal photography.

Two digital camera innovations made it possible to break down the barriers to amateurs engaging in photography; these were: 'the delay between taking a picture and viewing it, and the cost of each exposed frame' (Rubinstein & Sluis, 2008, p. 12). As Larsen (2008) highlights, the analogue camera captures what Barthes (2000) describes as the 'that has been' moment in time past, whereas the digital camera captures the here and now, it is 'when the spaces of picturing, posing and consuming converge' (Larsen, p. 147). The ability to see the image on screen immediately after the snapshot, and to keep

or delete and re-take it, creates an ideal environment for amateurs to learn about and play with various photographic techniques. A new affordance of the digital camera was that it enabled new sociabilities where photographer and photographed could participate in the collaborative process of image production (Larsen, 2008).

Also, the monetary cost of capturing and editing snapshots fell significantly. The cost of photography was no longer too high for non-professionals to participate, which is what Locke (2005) describes as the mass-amateurisation of digital image production. Rubinstein and Sluis (2008) point out that the digital revolution in photography could not have been achieved without the concurrent re-branding and marketing of personal computers, which put the computer at the centre of family life. The storing, viewing, editing, annotating and sharing of photographs was no longer confined to a physical print form, but enabled by the computer and the internet, allowing family and friends both near and far away to view the digital photographs.

The possibility of taking photos without using film and of altering them digitally led some theorists to describe the beginning of the 1990s as the 'post-photographic era' (Mitchell, 1992), in which photographic realism and photography died (Mirzoeff, 1999). However, Petersen (2009) argues that such distinctions in the history of photography, based on analogue and digital imaging technology, misleadingly construe the analogue photograph as an honest representation of reality, when in fact realistic representation is just one of many photographic genres. As Sontag (1979) writes, 'in deciding how a picture should look, in preferring one exposure to another, photographers are always imposing standards on their subjects ... photographs are as much an interpretation of the world as paintings and drawings are' (pp. 6-7). Here we can see that digital imaging technologies allow more possibilities for photography, but the question of whether photography represents reality depends more on the conscious framing of the photograph than on the technology or device employed.

Having discussed how Kodak photography developed in the West, mainly the US, we next focus on the local context and the trajectory of photography in Taiwan and how this gradually shifted from artistic expression to personal practice.

The development of photographic practice in Taiwan can be split into seven stages, according to Wu's (1993) summary for a project commissioned by the Taiwanese government, 'A Hundred Years of Taiwanese Photography History'. These are: 1) Introductory period: in the 1860s, photography was introduced into Taiwan mainly by Western missionaries, portrait painters who emigrated from Southern China, and merchants of photographic equipment from Southeast Asia; 2) Documentary period: roughly spanning from 1895, when China ceded Taiwan to Japan, to 1920, when Taiwan was under Japanese occupation and photography was primarily used by the Japanese ruling government to document Taiwan's geography, people and customs; 3) The first probation period (1920-1945): young Taiwanese learned about photography during their years of study in Japan or China, and brought back with them both an appreciation of and the skills required for photography. Amateur photography groups emerged, largely organised by traders in photographic devices. Yet, due to its high cost, photography was the privilege of the rich. And between 1945, when Japan's occupation of Taiwan ended, and 1949, when the nationalist government (Republic of China) fled to Taiwan, the practice declined; 4) The first period of flourishing: roughly 1950 to the mid-1960s, when young people who had studied photography abroad became active in mounting photography exhibitions, talks and salon discussions, and in organising classes and photography groups in Taiwan; 5) The 'fault' period: from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s when tight control was exercised over freedom of expression under martial law,[18] realistic or documentary photography was closely scrutinised by government, and photography was limited to salon photography or artistic topics, neither of which resonated with the amateur photographer or with ordinary people. The success of the

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[18] Martial law was imposed by Chiang Kai-shek in 1949, when, as President of the Nationalist Party, he moved the central government of the Republic of China to Taiwan after losing to the Communist Party in the Chinese civil war in mainland China. Martial law banned the formation of political parties and imposed tight restrictions on freedom of speech, assemblies and the press. The military and the secret police (the Taiwan Garrison Command) had the power to censor political commentary that was critical of government and to try civilians charged with sedition in military courts. Economic activities and everyday life, according to sociologist Michael Hsiao (Gluck, 2007), were under relatively looser control. Martial law was lifted in 1987 by President Chiang Ching-kuo, who set Taiwan on the road to political liberalisation (Hu, 2005).

first period of flourishing came to a halt; 6) The peak of reportage photography.[19] From the mid-1970s to the early 1980s, with the government's decision to improve Taiwan's infrastructure, the ideology of counter-attacking Mainland China was gradually replaced by one that focused on Taiwanese consciousness.[20] The dominant trend in photography was to uncover the culture and local beauty of Taiwan; 7) The second probation period: from the early 1980s to the early 1990s, when Taiwanese society became even more liberated. The abolition of martial law in 1987 allowed more freedom of speech, ideology and communication channels. The rapid growth of the economy meant that more ordinary people could afford to study photography at home or abroad, and there was more diversity in photographic subjects. This was a period when females were able for the first time to learn about photography because of the universalised imposition (from 1968) of nine years of compulsory education, and of significant changes in the gender distribution of professional and amateur photographers.[21]

1.6.2 Banal aesthetics

The previous section discussed how personal photographic practices were transformed as camera and computer technologies developed. In this section we address the relevant and current question of how a new 'banal aesthetics' emerged as a result of changes in and the resulting prevalence of personal photographic practices.

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[19] According to Wu (1998), this an umbrella term that includes photo journalism, realist photography, concerned photography, documentary photography and social landscape photography.

[20] Taiwanese consciousness is defined as 'Taiwanese people's characteristic spirit and tone of sentiment in their struggle for self-identity, as exhibited in their quest to form a sense of who the "Taiwanese people" are, and indeed what "Taiwan" itself is' (Huang, 2006, p. 153)

[21] The gender-imbalanced development in Taiwan has changed gradually since the introduction of nine years of compulsory education and increased participation of women in the labour force. These changes laid the foundation for a shift in gender equality and how women see themselves. By the late 1970s, the 'economic miracle' brought by industrialisation and urbanisation saw the emergence of a new middle class, more gender equality and the beginnings of a feminist movement, led by Annette Lu Hsiu-lien who later became the first vice president of Taiwan (Farris, 2004; Huang, 2008). Trends in participation in higher education indicate both shifts: the number of women entering higher education has increased with successive age cohorts and the gap between male and female attendance has narrowed. The number of women entering higher education in 2003 outstripped that of males (Budget Accounting and Statistics Executive Yuan, 2003). Compared with previous generations, whose lack of educational and financial resources limited their freedom in other areas, young women's improved material opportunities have provided greater independence.

The launch of Web 2.0 saw an exponential increase in user-generated content, including photo-sharing on sites such as Flickr and Wretch. Modern camera phones are equipped with high megapixel cameras providing image quality that is comparable to single-use cameras. Cameras are more compact in size and more affordable. The size of a smartphone is roughly the same as that of a good compact camera, and its image quality outstrips that of lower-end camera models. This has blurred the traditional distinction between the image quality and portability of camera phones and single-use cameras.

Digital photography builds on existing photographic practice and permits new uses of photography, allowing us to see the world and ourselves in more versatile ways. An important and related use of the camera phone, apart from its role in the private archiving of everyday life, is its capacity to encourage people to see their surroundings photographically, and to give aesthetic value to the banal (van House et al., 2005). The trend of photographing the banal encompasses camera phone use and compact camera use. Scholars, first mobile communication scholars and then internet studies scholars, have used various terms to describe this new photographic phenomenon that sees as much value as in conventional 'high' art and solemn life moments in the banal, such as the collection of fragments of everyday life (Okabe & Ito, 2006), vernacular creativity (Burgess, 2007); the aesthetics of banality (Koskinen, 2007), common banality (Petersen, 2008), and the spectacle of the micro-reality (Lee, 2009).

While we might assume that this attention to banal photographic objects is recent, Sontag (1979) reminds us that since the 1920s professional photographers have attended to the minute details of life. She points out that, although early decades of photography preferred idealised, beautiful images, professionals gradually revised the definition of beauty and ugliness and shifted from 'lyrical subjects' to 'plain, tawdry, or even vapid material' (p. 28), and that these pursuits of the beauty in the unusual were often rewarded with exhibition in museums, an example being Weston's toilet bowl and cabbage leaf. Sontag writes that photography democratises the notion of beauty, that 'the most enduring triumph of photography has been its aptitude for discovering beauty...as

existing everywhere... an unassuming functional snapshot may be as visually interesting, as eloquent, as beautiful as the most acclaimed fine-art photographs' (pp. 102-3). However, the difference between the professional photographer's and the layperson's capturing of the banal lies in their purpose – professionals set out with the more or less explicit intention of creating an 'art' piece, whereas the layperson is less likely to take a photograph 'for art's sake'.

The luxury of photographing the banal could not be afforded by the public until the advent of the compact camera. It is quite common to see photographs of rarefied moments juxtaposed on user-generated content websites such as Flickr, Photoblog or Wretch with mundane everyday pictures. These photographs are often organised by the user selecting a category to label their photographs, or posting them in a specific category/section of the site, forming what Murray (2008) calls a 'taste community'– a community formed because of its members' distinctive norms, aesthetic values and styles of practice. Bourdieu's (1990) example was camera club members with artistic judgment and social aspirations, and in 2012 we see enthusiasts form a '365 day self-portrait project' group on Flickr. This new kind of everyday aesthetic cultivated by various taste communities may be the fruit of digital imaging technology and social network software, with the former lowering the threshold for participating in photography, and the latter increasing the visibility of our own and other people's photographic work.

This shift toward collecting the banal in everyday life entails a new practice. Contrary to conventional photographic practice, where one usually thinks about composition beforehand or the photograph has a clear purpose (commemorative or intentional aestheticisation of the banal), photographs can be snapped 'without any archival or aesthetic purposes', but solely for the pleasure of expression (Riviere, 2005, p. 172). Although Riviere was writing about camera phone photography, her argument is equally valid for describing the broader trend in digital personal photography. Van Dijik (2008) argues specifically that some of the most profound shifts brought by the popularisation and digitalisation of photography in the past two decades are the move from family photography to individual photography, from providing records of family

life to being communication devices, and from sharing the material form of photographs as (memory) objects to sharing photographs as experiences. Rather than saying that one use of personal photography is being replaced by another use, we can say instead that it has become more versatile and flexible, allowing users to engage with it in ways not previously imagined. And it is against this backdrop of technology development, changes in aesthetics and the versatility of personal photography that teenagers' self-portraiture takes place.

1.7   Thesis Outline

This introductory chapter presented three girls and their practices of self-portraiture. It showed how the issues of identity, femininity, sexuality and new media intersect in seemingly banal self-portraiture work. It discussed two contexts of self-portraiture – the societal context of how self-portraiture is understood in moral/media panics, and the everyday life context of how personal photographic practices have evolved. It discussed the trajectory of how the research for this thesis was conceptualised, and presented the core research question related to self-portraiture in girls' everyday lives – how girls laugh with the camera, play with the camera, fret over their body shape with the camera, and make the camera their intimate friend.

Chapter 2 presents theoretical perspectives on self-portraiture. It discusses the theories of identity, ranging from gender identity, psychological and sociological approaches to identity, to how identity work is carried out on the internet. It then moves on to discuss key issues in girl's media studies: girls' relations with the media, and feminist critiques of contemporary consumer culture and of the commercial media landscape. The chapter ends by formulating four research sub-questions.

Chapter 3 provides the rationale for the methodological approach chosen in order to study teenage girls' self-portraiture: the relations between research questions and methods, why this research uses mixed methods, and what is unique about studying girls' culture. It discusses the research design and specific methods used to collect empirical data, addressing relevant practical matters that arose in the data collection. It presents

the legal and ethical issues that inform as well as confine the specific research design. The chapter ends with a reflection on the lessons learned during fieldwork about the research design.

Chapter 4, which is the first empirical chapter, examines Taiwanese teenagers' self-portraits on Wretch. It analyses codes of representation conventionally associated with femininity and masculinity in teenagers' self-portraits, and identifies what these codes of representation are and how they relate to girls' and boys' self-presentations. It categorises the self-portraits through cluster analysis, and reveals four distinctive styles of representation. Finally, it investigates the extent to which teenagers perform 'identity play' in self-portraits. This chapter paints a broad picture of Taiwanese teenagers' self-portraits in order to contextualise the participants' self-portraiture practice as revealed in Chapters 5, 6, and 7.

Chapter 5 investigates the role of self-portraiture and online photo-sharing in girls interpersonal communication. It discusses why girls post personal photographs online, how they construct their online space, and how they use the photographs for social purposes. It seeks to understand online self-portraiture from a more functional perspective of facilitating self-disclosure and social connection. It allows us to see both individuality and sociality within the same frame.

Following the identification in Chapter 4 of the representation styles common to teenage girls, and after examining girls' use of personal photographs for interpersonal communication in Chapter 5, Chapter 6 zooms in to examine the production of self-portraits. Seeing the practice of self-portraiture as self-presentation and 'play' involving identity work, this chapter explores girls' strategies of impression management and what self-portraiture means to them.

Chapter 7, the last empirical chapter, explores how gender identities are performed and maintained through self-portraiture, focusing particularly on two self-representation styles that are commonly 'cited' as representing ideal femininities: the cute and the sexy. It discusses girls' efforts to appear photogenic for the self-portraits, revealing that a

'proper' feminine self-image is hard work, and shows girls' attempts to negotiate between different ways of 'doing' girlhood.

Chapter 8, the concluding chapter, revisits the research questions and findings and provides a comprehensive overview of the role of self-portraiture in teenage girls' lives. It discusses the theoretical and methodological contributions of this thesis to the field of girlhood studies and the visual aspect of SNS studies. The final section suggests directions for future research, with a particular note on the prospects for girlhood studies.

Chapter 2 Theoretical Framework

2.1 Introduction

This thesis explores the role of online self-portraiture in young women's identity work. As discussed in Chapter 1, there is a need for research into young people's' self-portraiture that learns about the practice from their own perspectives and their own words, to enable a more balanced understanding that moves beyond the panic about teenagers' use of new media and loss of privacy and decency. This project positions girls at the centre of the enquiry and its primary area of interest is girls' media culture. The topic of girls' media use has gained visibility in the distinct field of research which can be described as 'girlhood studies', but also goes back to the late 1930s in the US (Kearney, 2008) and the late 1970s in the UK (Duits & van Zoonen, 2009). It is rooted academically in a number of disciplines such as sociology, cultural studies, media and communications, gender studies, youth studies, and – to some extent – psychology, and 'was born out of the commonplace disregard for issues of gender within youth studies and age within women's studies' (Harris, 2004a, xviii). Although highly interdisciplinary, girls' media studies are closely allied to the theories, methodologies and epistemologies of cultural studies (Kearney, 2011), as reflected in the theoretical framework for this thesis research.

Chapter 2 presents the theoretical framework used to explore, through the concepts of agency, performance, performativity, and cultural production, the question of girls' identity work in self-portraiture, including self-presentation, self-representation, media production and personal identity. It first unpacks the concept of identity work from psychological and sociological perspectives, drawing predominantly on the work of Erikson, Goffman and Giddens and their respective approaches to adolescent identity development, dramaturgy and identity as reflexive projects of the self. It introduces Butler's performativity theory in order to understand gender identity. It then discusses how identity work is done through computer-mediated communication in the age of digital media. The second half of this chapter contextualises this thesis research within childhood studies in order to signal its standpoint, which considers children to be

subjects with agency rather than objects that are shaped by a range of external forces. The chapter ends with a discussion of a key debate in girlhood studies – that of agency and power in girls' cultural practices of media production – which is important for the analysis and interpretation, in the empirical chapters, of girls' self-portraiture as identity work. Finally, the core research question stated in Section 1.5 is revisited, with four specific research sub-questions presented in light of the theoretical framework.

2.2   Identity

2.2.1 Psychological perspectives

One way to understand identity is to see it as developing through life stages as well as through physiological changes. This section discusses key psychological analyses of identity development, especially the transition from child to adult, which provide a useful backdrop for understanding identity development from a perspective that is sometimes labelled as essentialist.

Writing in 1904, American psychologist G. Stanley Hall was the first to construct the concept of 'adolescence' as a phase of development within a life cycle full of 'storm and stress'. Bodily development and physiological changes make adolescents subject to fluctuating psychological states, and provoke conflicts with parents and risky behaviours. Hall's account conjures up the popular discourse of adolescents as 'hormone-driven' and deviant. Another important figure in psychology is Erik Erikson (1968), who constructs psychological development in the life cycle in eight stages, each marked by a psychological conflict that must be resolved before progressing to the next. For him, adolescence is the most active phase of identity formation in one's life course, a 'psychosocial moratorium: a period of sexual and cognitive maturation and yet a sanctioned postponement of definitive commitment' (p. 75). In this important transitional life stage, adolescents explore and experiment with various identifications and roles in developing their own coherent interests and values. Unlike many psychologists who tend not to consider the broader social context, Erikson is distinctive in taking account of the social context in which adolescents are embedded, and

considering occupational identity, sexual identity and ideological values as forming the basis of ego identity. It is through seeking social validation - or, to use his term, 'ideological confirmation' (p. 74) - that adolescents repudiate some roles and configure socially accepted roles into their identity. Kidwell et al.'s (1995) study of adolescent identity exploration found that those who are actively exploring identity are more likely to experience 'self-doubt, confusion, disturbed thinking, impulsivity, conflicts with parents and other authority figures' (p. 785), which confirms Erikson's theory regarding the turmoil of adolescence.

While Erikson's perspective on identity development is quite linear, other psychologists suggest that identity can be composed of a 'multiple, organized set of cognitive schema' (Cote & Levine, 2002, p. 21). For example, Markus and Nurius (1986) used the term 'possible selves', as opposed to 'now selves', to describe 'individuals' ideas about what they might become, what they would like to become, and what they are afraid of becoming' (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 954), making a distinction between the possibilities, the hopes and the fears involved in developing identity. A subcomponent of 'possible selves' is 'hoped-for possible selves', which are 'socially desirable identities an individual would like to establish and believes that they can be established given the right conditions' (Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008, p. 1819). Conceptualising the self as having multiple possibilities allows us to seriously consider the self-concept as 'diverse and multifaceted without being fake, wishy-washy, or incoherent' (Markus & Nurius, 1986, p. 965). This imagining of the many possibilities of the self may be where engagement with identity construction starts (Dunkel, 2000). Higgins (1987, cited in Bargh, McKenna, & Fitzsimons, 2002, p. 34) introduced the concepts of ideal, ought and actual selves: 'the ideal self contains those qualities one strives someday to possess, the ought self those qualities one feels obligated to possess, and the actual self those one actually expresses to others at present'.

In addition to the above alternative ways of considering the self – now selves, actual selves, possible selves, hoped-for possible selves, ideal selves, etc. – new prefixes have been applied in the age of digital media to describe the self in terms of its relation

to the physical location: online self, offline self, virtual self. These distinctions are nuanced ways of indicating the degree of fulfilment in relation to a 'core' self in the corporeal body. The online or virtual self is often assumed to be less 'real' than the offline self, which is assumed to be the 'real' one, but Zhao, Grasmuck, and Martin (2008) question whether these distinctions hold in an onymous online environment such as Facebook. Although identities such as the hoped-for-possible selves are 'not yet fully actualised offline, they can have a real impact on individuals. Identities are what we convince others to think of us as; it matters not whether that happens online or offline, or whether they are anti-normative or socially desirable' (p. 1832). I want to extend their argument and to suggest that all kinds of selves – whether in onymous or anonymous environments, and despite their degree of fulfillment in the everyday corporeal body – are real in the sense that they form part of an individual's experience of self and can have an impact on the sense of self.

A general critique of the psychological approach to identity is its under-theorisation of the role of the social, and its overt location of identity within the individual – cognitive and intrapsychic – as if 'the individual is largely held responsible for that identity, in terms of both its merits and failings' (Cote & Levine, 2002, p. 48). Also, in the developmental psychology paradigm is the notion that childhood and adolescence are 'an apprenticeship for adulthood' (Kehily, 2009, p. 8), when individuals will develop their one and final identity, physicality and cognitive ability and the maturity that is assumed to characterise adulthood. Furthermore, whether normative conclusions reached on the basis of observation of and experiments with predominantly white, middle-class males can be used to explain people of different sex/gender, race, class, etc., remains debatable (Gilligan, 1982; Sechzer & Rabinowitz, 2008). For example, anthropologist Margaret Mead's (1928/1972) fieldwork in Samoa, a society completely different from American society, refuted the 'storm and stress' model. Her work demonstrated that adolescence was 'what social, cultural and economic forces dictated it should be' (Montgomery, 2007, p. 70) – an insight that echoes the new sociology of childhood, which is discussed in Section 2.5.

Despite criticisms of the psychological approach for its lack of accounting for the social, and despite the normative assumption behind the linear model, these concepts remain useful for understanding changes in self-concept, the 'developmental tasks' that may take place alongside changes in the body and, as Buckingham (2008) suggests, they are helpful in our interpretations of young people's engagement with digital media. There have been calls for developmental psychologists to investigate the media as one of the 'dominant activities and preoccupations of developing people' (Durkin & Blades, 2009, p.4). Subrahmanyam, Garcia, Harsono, Li and Lipana (2009) review a range of studies of the development of adolescent boys and girls, and identify three important developmental tasks that preoccupy adolescents in their online activities. These are: the construction of psychosocial identity, adjusting to sexuality and formulating sexual identity, and establishing interpersonal relationships with peers and romantic partners – all of which are closely related. Looking at how young people use the media for their developmental 'tasks' is a functional approach that helps to explain the why and the how of identity work online in task-oriented practical terms. However, this does not mean that the analyses and conclusions derived from psychological perspectives have to be confined to behavioural and functional accounts. We can still understand identity work online as a site of meaning-production and sense-making.

2.2.2 Sociological perspectives

While psychologists study identity development and formation in the life cycle, sociologists tend to focus on identity maintenance in the life-course and, as Cote and Levine (2002) point out, these differences reflect differing assumptions that identity implyies 'monumental changes'– rapid and great changes in periods of life, or 'incremental changes' – gradual and accumulated changes over the course of life. The above-mentioned psychological approaches paint a picture of the individual child in a biological development process with little effect from her/his social surroundings. In what follows I discuss important sociological accounts of identity that lay the foundation for how this research understands children's and teenagers' identity work in its social context.

Sociologist Erving Goffman adopts a dramaturgical approach, most notably in his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), in order to analyse how people maintain a sense of self and self-image by managing and controlling how they present the self in interaction with others, who constitute the social audience. The term performance is used to refer to an individual's social activity and interaction that take place in front of observers and have some influence on the observers. Goffman argues that performance is shaped by situations and audiences and constructed to provide others with impressions that are coherent with the desired goals of the actor/individual. Individuals may make use of a 'front' – 'the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual' (1959, p. 32), which establishes the appearance and manner that are deemed appropriate for the actor's role in a particular social situation. An established social role is usually prescribed with a specific front that the actor is compelled to perform in a consistent manner, whether or not s/he wills this. Goffman uses the term 'impression management' to refer to the actor's efforts to communicate the role through contrived performance. He conceptualises the individual as composed of two parts: a performer who stages the performance, and a character performed on stage. Despite acknowledging the individual's agency in learning, performing and perfecting the credibility of his performance, Goffman explains in painstaking detail that the self is 'a *product* of a scene that comes off, and is not a *cause* of it' (1959, p. 245, emphasis in original). Elsewhere he states explicitly that 'self is not an entity half concealed behind events, but a changeable formula for managing oneself during them' (Goffman, 1974, p. 573). In other words, Goffman does not think of the self as something that has a specific location within the actor, but as 'a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented' (p. 245). In this sense, it would appear that Goffman does not attribute sovereignty to either the role or the self (Branaman, 1997). His choice of the words impression, presentation, front, face, as Wynn and Katz (1997) point out, indicates that Goffman is less interested in selfhood per se, and more interested in 'the image of self that social participants put forth as viable means of negotiating normal social life' (Wynn & Katz, 1997, p. 301).

In contrast to Goffman's lukewarm attention to the self of the performers engaging in social interactions, Anthony Giddens (1991) gives an elaborate account of identity,

which he sees to be in flux as modern societies evolve into 'late-modern', 'post traditional' societies. Giddens proposes that, as the influences of tradition fade, every individual is now responsible for making conscious choices about a wide range of life decisions, from occupation to relationships – a reflexive project of self. Giddens (1991, p. 52) states that: 'The identity of the self, in contrast to the self as a generic phenomenon, presumes reflexive awareness'. Therefore, the self in the reflexive project is composed of a series of biographical narratives that one continuously creates, sustains, reflects on, revises and reorders. A stable self-identity is achieved by keeping a set of coherent, satisfactory narratives (or stories) about the self that one would have no difficulty explaining to others or to oneself. Although this is reminiscent of developmental theories of identity formation in adolescence, Giddens does not see adolescence as the stage on which a stable identity is formed; instead, he construes identity as fluid and the reflexive project as ongoing throughout life. In addition, he contests that the body, rather than being a passive object of control, is part of the action system of the reflexive project. For him, this new freedom of choice, and the multitude of possibilities offered to an individual by consumer culture, are part of an overall positive democratisation process (Buckingham, 2008).

Giddens's optimism about social transformation is criticised by McRobbie (2009) for failing to consider the regulatory dimension of the forces that are said to drive reflexive modernisation. Arguing in the context of the undoing of feminism, McRobbie asserts that choice and individualised biographies may well be a form of patriarchal coercion and constraint that act upon and among individuals. Her argument raises the other side of the reflexive self-project—that is, the Foucauldian perspective. The French philosopher Michel Foucault believed that (gender) identity was merely a discourse produced by a mode of knowledge that is constructed as a sort of power to maintain social order and discipline. Rather than seeing power as a repressive force working from the top down through authorities, Foucault (1980, p. 119) argues:

> What gives power its hold, what makes it accepted, is quite simply the fact that it does not
> weigh like a force which says no, but that it runs through, it produces things, it induces
> pleasure, it forms knowledge, it produces discourse: it must be considered as a productive

network which runs through the entire social body much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression.

The 'bio-power' of capitalist society exerts its control through discipline, as exemplified in the design of the Panopticon, which 'acts directly on individuals; it gives "power of mind over mind"' (Foucault, 1977, p. 206). One feels constantly supervised and inspected by a power, even though there may be no warden in the tower. Apart from the power exercised by institutions, Foucault points out that the 'technologies of the self' are the subtlest, most penetrating way of constructing subjectivity because they utilise certain acts to transform body, mind, behaviour, thinking and lifestyle (Foucault, 1988); power aligns itself with normative ideologies and constitutes a series of education and socialisation processes. Therefore, Foucault's notion of power can be understood as emanating both from the exterior and from the interior. Exterior power arises from discourses produced by social structures incorporating power/knowledge in order to discipline the individual. Interior power derives from the technologies of the self through which one internalises exterior disciplines into the interior gaze, thereby also constructing subjectivity (Gauntlett, 2002). In this sense, the individual reflexivity crucial to self-narratives is a means of disciplinary power in the guise of choice and agency, a product of covert yet effective 'governmentality'. It is through conscious individual self-monitoring, or – worse – self-surveillance, that this power is reproduced and maintained. For instance, feminists have applied Foucault's approach in order to examine how advertisements and women's magazines continue to promote a particular kind of 'self-regulatory agenda' for defining the norms of femininity through which women can sanction themselves (Gill, 2007a; McRobbie, 1996; Tait, 2003).

2.3   Gender Identity/Subjectivity

Feminine adolescence paradigmatically materializes theories about bodily presence, identification, and pleasure. (Driscoll, 2002, p.235)

One's gender identity, like other aspects of identity, is part of the identity project. However, Budgeon (2003) questions Giddens's theory of the 'project of the self' for formulating an 'instrumental relation' between the self and the body, which treats the

mind as the subject and the body as a malleable object responsive to the narrative of self that the mind wishes to construct. Budgeon argues that mind and body are constituted through our lived and embodied experiences of one another: '[T]he relationship between self and body is about a process more complex than that which involves the inscription of the text upon the surface of the body' (p. 43). Bodies should be seen as 'events that are continually in the process of becoming' (p. 50), and as 'the result of various forms of self-inventions which occur within embodied practices which also are not effects of representation but sites of production' (p. 52). In order to understand Budgeon's emphasis on the continuous process and the mutual enabling relation between representation and production, we turn to Butler's theory of gender.

While essentialist perspectives see gender as a biological or psychological given, social constructionist perspectives see gender as something brought into being through the everyday 'doing' of gender. This latter view was developed most notably by Judith Butler in her book *Gender Trouble* (1990), in which she argues that: 'There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; ... identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results' (p. 25). In other words, there is no fixed, knowable category of gender that one abides by; rather, gender is actualised through a series of ongoing performances of gender. Butler (2003, p. 394) further explains:

> … there is neither an 'essence' that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal
> to which gender aspires; because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the
> idea of gender and without those acts, and there would be no gender at all. Gender is, thus, a
> construction that regularly conceals its genesis.

Simply put, gender is not something we have, but something we do, construct, perform or express; it is a 'ritualistic reproduction' (Butler, 1994a, p. 34). The emphasis on gendering 'action' rather than gender possession is demonstrated by Butler's choice of the concept of 'performativity' taken from speech act theory. Gender performative theory has its root in J.L. Austin's speech act theory of linguistic performatives, which recognises that some utterances, called *constative*, state facts, while others, *performative* utterances, perform the actions to which the words point. Butler (1993, p. 13) draws on this theory and defines performative as the 'discursive practice that enacts or produces

that which it names'. Often, the performative utterance is taken to have a constative meaning, that is, what an utterance is seeking to enact and perform through the discourse is received/perceived as if it were a fact. In this sense, gender is an 'embodied act in the same way that performative language is a speech act' (Chinn, 2010, p. 110).

Butler uses the example of giving an infant a girl's name to show how the choosing and giving of a name is 'at once the setting of a boundary, and also the repeated inculcation of a norm' (1994b, p. 8) that is related to the female gender. In another example, Butler suggests that, when we see a girl puts on lipstick, rather than thinking this is a knowable female subject putting on lipstick, we see the act of applying lipstick as a 'girling' (1994b, p. 7), an action that produces the subject of a female. What these two examples highlight is the importance of repetition and citation in the performativity of gender, that it is through repeatedly citing norms that are conventionally associated with the female gender that one is made into a female subject, and that these 'markers of truth' (Brady & Schirato, 2011, p. 46) concerning gender are the products of discourses about what constitutes gender norms, which serve to present these as essential, real categories and to conceal the fact that they are repetitions.

However, despite using action words to describe how gender is 'done', Butler does not use the word performativity to imply in the theatrical sense that one can choose to act a different gender at will, as if putting on a mask. She posits that there is not necessarily an 'I' behind or following the gendering act, but rather the 'I' 'emerges only within and as the matrix of gender relations themselves' (Butler, 1993, p. 7). What this suggests is not that there is no subject, but, paradoxically, that 'the subject is not exactly where we would expect to find it – i.e. "behind" or "before" its deeds' (Salih, 2002, p. 45), but constituted in the acts themselves.

Juxtaposing Butler's performative theory with Goffman's dramaturgical approach to identity, Bordo (1993) suggests that we may see Butler as a 'poststructuralist, feminist reincarnation' (p. 289) of Goffman's identity theory. Both argue that identities – whether gendered or not – are the 'dramatic *effect* (rather than the cause) of our performance' (p.

289, emphasis original), although Butler goes on to argue that this effect serves to regulate and maintain the heterosexual matrix, while Goffman leaves the gender aspect untheorised. The idea that there is no doer behind the deed, no core identity behind a performance, may be unsettling, but as Bordo (p. 290) writes,

> Whether or not one is willing to go so postmodern as to deny all interior determinations of identity, the performative approach is enormously insightful as a framework for exploring the ongoing, interacting, imitative processes by means of which the self, gender, and their illusions of authenticity are constructed.

Building on the theory of gender performativity, Nayak and Kehily (2008, p.5) suggest conceptualising gender as *practices*, as 'a lived process …. a set of relations configured through technologies, bodies, spatial, discursive and material processes', and exploring how gender is brought into being through practices that we need to examine related to the 'production, regulation, consumption and performance of gender' (p. 5) – aspects vital for sustaining gender performance. A gender identity that appears coherent is the result of what they refer to as 'gender achievement', behind which lie painstaking efforts to make identity appear as it is supposed to be. What their approach suggests for the present research is attention to questions about how girls take part in the 'girling' process through self-portraiture, and to what kinds of gender norm are cited (or not) in girls' 'performative tropes' (Nayak & Kehily, 2008, p. 163).

Shifting the emphasis from gender performance to regulation, Walkerdine (1993) argues that girlhood is produced in and through the discursive practices that regulate girls' actions, and that we therefore need also to examine how girls *become* and *live* as female subjects in various 'circumstances, fictions and fantasies which tell us what femininity is' (p. 14). Furthermore, Walkerdine (2009, pp. 119-121) suggests that:

> We could understand subjectivity as composed of just that relation between the discourses, practices and circuits of exchange and the practices of self-management through which those contradictory positions are held together and lived…In this account, the subject is not made social, but rather the social is the site for the production of discursive practices which produce the possibility of being a subject.

To illustrate how the female subject is produced in competing discourses about femininity, she uses the example of very young girls wearing heavy makeup and singing pop songs in a 1980s British television series, *Minipops*. The broadsheets at that time voiced a middle-class position and were concerned about the projection of adult sexuality and about girls being deprived of their childhood innocence, while the tabloid papers voiced the working-class position and were keen to discuss the girls' fame and potential. The girls' desire to become famous, which did not include being exploited or fetishised, is clearly caught between the two competing discourses that both sought to establish their subject positions and claimed to care for their best interests. On this basis, Walkerdine refutes Laura Mulvey's (1975) argument that sees representations of women only as 'symptom and myth of male fantasy' (Walkerdine, 1997, p. 166), allowing no space for girls' own fantasies and dreams of upward mobility. She demonstrates how the many possible, competing readings of one phenomenon each have a place in the 'apparatuses of social regulation' (p.189). Walkerdine concludes that understanding how a girl manages her subjectivity amidst various positions allows us to approach childhood as simultaneously both 'interior and exterior, individual and social, psychology and sociology' (p. 123); all are important aspects to examine in the study of gender identity and femininity.

2.4 Identity Work and Computer-Mediated Communication

Having reviewed theories on identity work in Section 2.2 and 2.3, we now turn to discuss the role of the computer-mediated communication (CMC) in identity work, especially in relation to that of young people. Computer-mediated communication (CMC) is pertinent to our understandings of self-portraiture because of its two main features: it provides new affordances and venues for identity work; through CMC we reveal aspects of ourselves to others and receive responses, it can therefore serve important 'interpersonal and relational' functions (Tong & Walther, 2011; Whitty, 2009). This section is organised precisely around these two aspects and discusses, firstly, how CMC is used for identity work such as identity exploration, performance and play, and

secondly, how one particular kind of CMC – social networking sites – may be useful for interpersonal communication.

2.4.1 Identity exploration and play

The key characteristic of CMC – anonymity – affords increased opportunities for an individual to be honest or deceptive, thus creating a paradoxical relation between identity and CMC (Leonard, Withers & Sherblom, 2011). As the well-known saying that 'on the internet, nobody knows that you are a dog' illustrates, some scholars in the early research into CMC on the internet held the view that, because of anonymity, reduced social cues and absence of identity markers of age, race, gender, etc. in text-based CMC, users would be able to use the internet to interact with others through newly-constructed alternative identities that were radically different from their offline selves. Turkle (1995) observes how users of MUDs (multi-user domains) employ these to 'self-fashion and self-create' (p. 180) themselves into individuals with different personality traits, of the opposite gender, or even animals. A notable example was a male player who played four different characters in three different MUDs and said that 'RL [real life] is just one more window' (p. 13). Turkle recognises the importance of play in identity construction, and argues that the disembodied and anonymous interactions in these virtual, text-based environments are 'laboratories' for individuals to build identity. In the same vein, Danet (1998) argues, on the basis of her studies of IRC (Internet Relay Chat) and MOOs, that '*the typed text provides the mask*' (p. 129, original emphasis) for players to masquerade in their online identity play and experimentation with gender performance; one may engage in cross-gender play, or even possess multiple identities online. She argues that, in IRC, appearance is 'neutralised' and players can maintain a camouflage of their 'real-life' gender identity for a sustained period of time.

While such views capture the extent to which people may explore and experiment with their identity online, other scholars have questioned the assumptions that the absence of a physical body in CMC can free one from the influence of offline constraints, eventually leading to a postmodern, fluid identity, where 'we *become* what we play,

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argue about, and build' (Turkle, 1994, p. 167). Studies have shown that identity characteristics continue to shape how one presents oneself and interacts with others online. With regard to text-based communications, Herring (1993) found in her study of academic discussion lists that the offline power dynamic between men and women persisted – women tend to be more polite and supportive, while men tend to be more assertive and less often to abide by conventional norms of politeness. She argues that this is because offline communication patterns are brought online, thus making a case against the argument that gender differentials cease to matter online. In another study, of LambdaMOO, Nakamura (1995) found that in users' racial role-playing, or what she called 'identity tourism', racist discourses and racial stereotyping were employed in the textual performance of race. For example, identities as Asian women were adopted by reinforcing popular myths and stereotypes, thus serving to perpetuate racist discourses and also deterring 'real-life' Asians from performing their race in this space.

As CMC has evolved, later empirical studies have shown that relations between identity and CMC do not easily assume such polarised positions of either 'a brave new world' or 'nothing new under the sun'. As Slater (2002) argues, the assumption that there is a qualitative distinction between online and offline is led from the perception that the internet is virtually real (i.e. not quite real), exists in a place that is virtual, is disembedded from physical locations, and that one is disembodied from the corporeal body when online. The online/offline distinction does not automatically mean that the two are independent of each other, and that one can go so postmodern as to argue that the body can be left behind when one goes online. Internet scholarship has modified the question to instead investigate 'embodied everyday experiences' (van Doorn, Wyatt, & van Zoonen, 2008) of how people are using CMC for a range of purposes in a variety of contexts and communicative modes, ranging from text-based chat rooms (Greenfield & Subrahmanyam, 2003), newsgroups (Fredrick, 1999), personal homepages (Chandler & Roberts-Young, 1998; Döring, 2002), blogs (Huffaker & Calvert, 2005; Siles, 2012), and online dating (Gibbs, Ellison, & Lai, 2011), to visual-based gaming (Griffiths et al. 2011), design of avatars (Kolko, 1999; Thomas, 2007), online photo-sharing (Van House, 2007; Murray, 2008; van Dijck, 2011) and so on.

Youth researchers are particularly interested in learning about how young people carry out their identity work online – the exploration, performance, play, construction, maintenance, and even subversion of aspects of their identities. These studies look at a range of youth activities online, including SNS profiles (Hinduja & Patchin, 2007; Jones, Millermaier, Goya-Martinez, & Schuler, 2009; Moreno et al., 2009; boyd, 2008; Williams & Merten, 2008), blogs (Huffaker & Calvert, 2005), personal homepages (Stern, 2002), chat rooms (Subrahmanyam, Smahel, & Greenfield, 2006), instant messaging (Stern, 2007), guestbooks (Enochsson, 2007), and uses of Avatars (Thomas, 2007). However, most studies focus on verbal or textual elements; only a few examine how visual elements, such as personal photographs, are employed in the communication and representation of the self online (Donoso & Ribbens, 2010; Elm, 2009; Mendelson & Papacharissi, 2011; Schwarz, 2010; Siibak 2006, 2009).

2.4.2 Interpersonal communication via social networking sites

Online identity work is as much about the content communicated as it is about the meta-aspect of *why* we communicate such content to others. It may be perplexing to some why people post personal information that leads to the revelation of private details on the internet that are open for public or semi-public viewing. Articles with titles such as 'Oops, I've left my diary open to the whole world' (Monian, 2006), 'Profiles as conversation' (boyd & Heer, 2006), and 'Social network profiles as taste performances' (Liu, 2007) highlight implicitly or explicitly the fact that there are communicative partners or an audience: children's digital diaries have an 'instant dialogical' aspect; the SNS profile, with its various contents such as photographs, personal info, list of friends, is a 'medium for ongoing conversation in multiple modalities' (boyd & Heer, 2006, p. 10); the list of interests included in a social network profile is a performance of one's taste to others. While analysing the benefits of employing CMC for identity work, we should remember that this takes place in a communicative environment, and therefore is inherently a communication in front of a group of people connected by computer

networks – what boyd (2008) calls 'networked publics' – even though sometimes there seems to be little social interaction, but only one-directional communication.

SNS are prominent communicative venues in the age of Web 2.0, and are found to be used mainly to connect and communicate with pre-existing social networks (Ellison et al., 2007). So, even though users may use pseudonyms (as in the case of many Taiwanese SNS), posting personal photographs such as self-portraits inevitably gives out certain cues to one's offline physical traits, and therefore concerns about identity play as dramatic as deception are raised less frequently in studies of SNS. In fact, Subrahmanyam et al. (2009) found that online contexts are 'psychologically connected' to offline contexts, refuting the idea that, because the online is disembodied, it is therefore disembedded from lives offline. Teenagers are using SNS not as a radically different world where they take on an alternative identity, but as just another venue for gathering and an 'always-on' connection, into which offline dynamics extend; the SNS fits seamlessly with their everyday life offline (boyd, 2008). Furthermore, boyd points out that the importance of this space is growing, and that SNS are even replacing other, physical spaces for 'hanging out' due to increased constraints on teenagers regarding places where they are allowed to gather.

As Subrahmanyam et al. (2009) argue, establishing close relationships with peers and romantic partners is an important developmental issue for adolescents because adolescence is the time when they start developing independence from their families, and peers also help them to deal with the various developmental tasks in the construction of identity. SNS is useful precisely for such communicative and connective purses. As Bryant, Marmo and Ramirez (2011) outline, SNS can serve relational and pro-social functions such as initiating relationships, maintaining relationships, reconnecting with relational partners, identity work including experimentation, forming and managing impressions, seeking (social) information and metacommunication. Whether you 'like' a friend's status update on Facebook, or whether you would 'recommend' a friend's self-portraits on Wretch Album – this does send some unarticulated messages to relational partners. Posting personal photographs such as self-portraits on SNS can be seen as one

such form of interpersonal communication – it is a photographic practice that is subsequently mediated and communicated through computers and the internet, and serves as a vehicle for self-disclosure that facilitates the relationship development and maintenance that are key to adolescent identity work.

A key concept that is helpful for examining the communicative function of SNS is that of self-disclosure. Self-disclosure is defined as 'a person revealing his or her important thoughts, self-evaluations, intense feelings, or significant past experiences' (Rotenberg, 1995, p. 1) through verbal or non-verbal communication. This is particularly important in the development and maintenance of relationships. Of course, the kind of information we disclose about ourselves depends on the relational partner and the objective of the relationship. In order to cultivate trust and closeness in a relationship, it is necessary to reveal to the relationship partner more than is known publicly and aspects of self that are rarely publicly expressed or presented, such as the 'real me' or 'true self' (McKenna, Green, & Gleason, 2002). While the traditional definition of self-disclosure refers only to face-to-face contexts with direct message recipients, the concept of self-disclosure has been expanded recently to include online environments (Joinson, 2001; Kim & Dindia, 2011) and also non-directed self-disclosure, such as in blogs (Stefanone & Lackaff, 2009). Although to date there is no consensus about whether people self-disclose more online than offline (Nguyen, Bin, & Campell, 2012), there is no doubt that self-disclosure online is as important for personal relationships as self-disclosure offline. Self-disclosure has been shown to be a core communication behaviour on SNS such as Facebook (Walther et al., 2009; Ledbetter et al., 2011), which has features that actively promote users' self-disclosure (Mazer, Murphy, & Simonds, 2007). There are also increased scholarly attention in people' self-disclosure behaviours in other CMC, such as blogging (Jang & Stefanone, 2011; Ko & Kuo, 2009; Qian & Scott, 2007), forums (Barak & Gluck-Ofri, 2007), homepage construction (Dominick, 1999; Stern, 2002), Instant Messaging (Valkenburg, Sumter, & Peter, 2011), and a range of content-creation activities on Web 2.0 platforms (Stefanone & Lackaff, 2009).

The importance of photographs as another form of self-disclosure has begun to be acknowledged (Donoso & Ribbens, 2010); the visual cues in photographs reveal as much rich information about the self as verbal communications. As Suler (2009, p. 341) puts it, 'the image is a way to represent memories of what is important in one's life, to shape personal meaning, and to express ideas, experiences, and emotions that may not be easily verbalized'. When girls share self-portraits in personal albums, these two traits are demonstrated: the photographs show the 'facts', such as school sports days or outings, and serve as archives of experiences. Portrait photographs show the subjects' feelings at a particular moment. According to Walther (1996), online environments provide several distinctive opportunities for controlled self-disclosure and self-presentation. Firstly, the information presented can be edited – it is possible to go back and revise or remove what is considered less-than-ideal information about the self. Secondly, the asynchronous nature of some CMC, such as posting photographs or blogs, means that there is more time to deliberate over what information to reveal. Thirdly, one can focus cognitive resources on the design of information without having simultaneously to attend to other unrelated tasks, which is unavoidable in a face-to-face setting. Joinson (2001) argues that the perceived visual anonymity online makes subjects feel less 'identifiable' and 'accountable' for their actions compared with offline or public situations; it makes the subjects feel more relaxed about revealing information about themselves.

Taking a functional perspective on self-disclosure, Derlega and Grzelak (1979, pp. 154-162) summarise its role in relationships as: a) to gain social validation; b) to achieve social control; c) to achieve self-clarification; d) to exercise self-expression; and e) to enhance relationship development. The content of the self-disclosure may be descriptive – factual information about oneself, or evaluative – personal judgments and thoughts. If the information disclosed is only about oneself, then it is *personal* self-disclosure; if it is about interactions or relationships with others, it is *relational* self-disclosure. These functions are elaborated in Section 5.8, where the appeal of self-portraiture is examined through the lens of self-disclosure. All these functions of self-disclosure seem applicable

to adolescents' identity work of seeking answers to the ultimate question of who they are (Erikson, 1968).

2.5   Understanding Childhood Agency

After laying out in the preceding sections the theoretical underpinning for exploring identity construction and identity work online, the second half of this chapter shifts the focus to the subject of this study – children and young people – and introduces the debates that are key to framing our understandings of girls' media culture.

A child is defined by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child as a 'human being below the age of eighteen years' (Article One). Thus the term child or children encompasses the common understanding of 'teenager' or 'youth' and childhood years. However, academic studies of childhood and of youth are largely separate. As Nayak and Kehily (2008) point out, 'youth continues to be studied as young adults rather than late childhood subjects' (p. 8). The term youth itself is a sociological term that refers to the life phase between childhood and adulthood, and is associated with perspectives from sociological or cultural studies. Adolescence refers to roughly the same age group as youth (from 13 to early 20s, Nayak & Kehily, 2008), but speaks from a different research tradition. It is a biographical category and emphasises the developmental aspect of a human being's life cycle, and is used in the fields of biology and psychology. In the discussion above I retained the terms (i.e. youth or adolescent) as used in their original fields, but in the rest of this thesis I use the terms 'teenager' and youth to signpost my theoretical leaning toward socio-cultural approaches.

Sections 2.1 to 2.3 discussed perspectives from dominant psychological and sociological approaches on understanding identity development and maintenance. Within each disciplinary approach there are different assumptions about the child/children's subject position, and how their subjectivity is conceptualised in the research. This section shifts the focus from identity to agency. It analyses the position and voice of children in different theories, and introduces the 'new sociology of

childhood' as a way of highlighting how the concept of children's agency should be part of the framework for exploring young people's identity work online.

Section 2.2.1 showed that psychology – in particular developmental psychology – builds on the assumptions that childhood is natural rather than social, and that maturation to a finished, complete stage is inevitable. The most influential figure in the study of children's cognitive development, Jean Piaget (1972), describes this discipline as studying the development of 'mental functions, in as much as this development can provide an explanation, or at least a complete description, of their mechanisms in the finished state' (p. 26). Piaget describes children's cognitive development as unfolding naturally in a series of stages, from the sensory-motor stage to the preparational stage, the concrete operational stage and eventually the formal operational stage. From Piaget's description one can see that he measured children's development against the model of a fully developed, rational, intelligent adult. The assumption that children are underdeveloped and hence incompetent has led some to call this approach the 'deficiency model' (Lemish, 2008), which sees children as 'human becomings' rather than human beings (James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998). Furthermore, using ages and linear stages to explain childhood is a problematic standardisation that treats childhood as a 'universal constant' (Prout, 2008, p. 27) and subjects all children to the Western version of ideal adulthood. Assumptions about what makes a child's development normal, as Walkerdine (2008) notes, operate within a particular theoretical framework that is 'produced at a specific historical moment as an effect of power' (p. 116). In other words, the 'truths' about child development are, in Foucauldian language, a set of discourses produced as part of 'technologies of population management' (p. 116).

Another influential approach that informs academic discussions of childhood is the concept, from the sociology tradition, of socialisation, now referred to as the 'old' sociology of childhood. Running in parallel with cognitive psychology's concern about the child's maturation, are its concerns about a different kind of maturation, the process of children's inclusion into the society—namely, socialisation. Socialisation is conceptualised as occurring in two ways (James, Jenks, & Prout 1998): on the one hand there is the 'hard' way that sees socialisation as internalising social constraints through

external regulation. Here the individual child is largely shaped by structural factors rather than by his/her own agency. On the other hand there is the 'softer' way, influenced by symbolic interactionist G. H. Mead, which construes socialisation as the individual acquiring the necessary interactional skills through the to-and-fro negotiation of the relationship between self and others. Either way, the child is conceptualised as 'a lump of clay in need of being molded to fit the requirements of a social system' (Knapp, 1999, p.55).

The concept of socialisation has also been used by psychologists. For example, those interested in the learning about gender stereotypes (Reid, Cooper, & Banks, 2008) argue that the social expectations of appropriate gender qualities have been 'socialized into our consciousness' (p. 240) through an array of personal and institutional sources acting as agents of socialisation – the media being one of these. Among the many dimensions of gender stereotypes, a key one related to teenage girls' mental and physical well-being is concern with body-related ideals perpetuated in media content because puberty presents girls with dilemmas about weight gain associated with bodily growth and increased awareness of the ideal body image. Although work along these lines seeks to protect teenagers from harm, and may have been conducted by feminist researchers, it has been criticised for positioning teenagers as potential victims of the media (Kearney, 2011), without considering their agency.

The main criticism of the socialisation research tradition is its assumption that maturation is marked by an individual's learning about social norms and her or his ultimate inclusion in society. It is society that exercises influence on the individual, and it is the individual who strives to eventually be included in society. Again, the child is seen not as who she or he is at the current stage, but as a socially incompetent person learning to become an adult who is socialised, and hence a competent member of society.

The 'new sociology of childhood' was conceptualised in an attempt to intervene in the above perspectives, which position children as deficient and incompetent. James and Prout (1997) argue that, 'the immaturity of children is a biological fact of life but the ways in which it is understood and made meaningful is a fact of culture' (p. 7). They

synthesise the key tenets of this new paradigm as: first, understanding childhood as a social construction constituted at a specific time in a specific spatial context, a matter of concern separate from biological immaturity; second, children should be seen as active agents shaping and being shaped by social surroundings, rather than being passive; third, acknowledging children's agency, children are worthy of study in their own right, rather than as 'adults-becoming'. Such an approach seeks to reconstruct the taken-for-granted, essentialist assumptions about children and to examine the 'modes of discourses whereby children are brought into being' (James & Prout, p. 27).

While this new body of work is creditable in its intention to readdress childhood, it does not give sufficient attention to the role of media in children's lives (Livingstone & Drotner, 2008). Furthermore, if the new sociology of childhood has elucidated the ways in which childhood is not an essential state, then simply refuting the notion of the 'incompetent child' in developmental psychology or socialisation theory in favour of the 'autonomous child' is merely moving from one end of the spectrum to the other, leaving unresolved the real question of children's agency (Buckingham, 2000; Walkerdine, 2009). Prout (2000) reminds us that acknowledging children's agency without theorising 'agency' risks an essentialist treatment of the term that renders the discovery of agency the terminus (p. 16) of enquiry. He suggests that 'agency' be treated as the analytical point of departure for questions about how children have certain effects in their social world on some occasions, but not others.

Situating 'agency' within the debates about the power relationships between media and audience in media and cultural studies, we see the dichotomous populism-pessimism position (Buckingham, 2000). Populism regards popular culture as an empowering means of resisting dominant ideologies; the pessimist position tends to reach an impasse in its effort to counter the celebratory populist discourse. To move the argument forward, Livingstone (2009) develops four positions (see Table 1) that provide a more nuanced way of considering children's agency in relation to the media – in her case, the internet (p. 16):

Table 1 Four positionings of children's agency

	Active	Passive
Hopes	Agent	Beneficiary
Fears	Villain	Victim

Table 1 captures the implicated relationship between individual agency and social structure, and our hopes of children exercising agency, but fears about their agentic forces going out of control. Livingstone suggests that the answer to children's engagement with the internet is not a single choice, but possibly multiple choices that involve carefully considering all four positions before reaching a conclusion. In other words, researchers should pay heed to 'how children exert agency online…in the context of resisting certain structures and pressures while succumbing to others' (Livingstone, 2009, p. 32).

2.6 Girls' Media Culture

2.6.1 Media consumption and production

Having acknowledged the importance of children's agency, we next focus on female children – girls. This section reviews some key studies in the theoretical debates on female media culture and females' agency, in order to provide a backdrop to the analysis of girls' online self-portraiture practices.

Two scholars, developmental psychologist Carol Gilligan and feminist researcher Angela McRobbie, are considered 'foremothers' who paved the way to modern girlhood studies (Mazzarella & Pecora, 2007). Carol Gilligan (1982), in her landmark book, *In a Different Voice*, challenged the dominant developmental framework established by male researchers and based on experiments with males, and introduced an alternative perspective on young females' moral development. She asserted that women's development was not, as male researchers often concluded, incomplete or inferior; rather, women were simply more inclined to think in terms of caring and relationships, resulting in different judgments from those made by males. While her work is not uncontroversial

or without criticism, her contribution to rectifying the omission of girls from an academic research that remains largely male-centred has been influential across several disciplines.

Angela McRobbie played an equally important role in bringing girls' voices to the British cultural studies of youth carried out by the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) in the mid-1970s and early 1980s. McRobbie noticed that, in her colleagues' studies of youth culture (e.g. Paul Willis, 1977; Dick Hebdige 1979), the foci were invariably placed on how white, working-class boys developed their ritualised cultures in order to resist the dominant structures. In these studies, girls were given the subordinate role of sidekicks of their male counterparts, as if girls were incapable of actively participating in cultural activities taking place in the public space of the streets. McRobbie and Jenny Garber brought girls' cultural consumption to the forefront in a 1976 study, 'Girls and Subcultures'. They argued that, rather than contesting girls' invisibility in male subcultures, the important question was to discover 'the complementary ways in which young girls interact among themselves and with each other to form a distinctive culture of their own…' (p. 22). One of McRobbie and Garber's original contributions was proposing the idea of girls' 'bedroom culture', arguing that girls 'negotiate different leisure and personal spaces', and 'offer different types of resistance' from boys (p. 24). The private space of the bedroom was a much more important site of meaning-making for the development of female subjectivity than the streets, and it follows that girls are offered different ritualistic cultural possibilities of resisting. Since the publication of McRobbie and Garber's study, teenagers' bedrooms have been conceived of by various scholars as places where they engage in identity work by experimenting with multiple possible selves (Harris, 2004b).

Within girls' bedroom culture, teen magazines are one of the forms of cultural consumption that have received relentless attention from feminist scholars asking questions about the ideologies of femininity in magazine content and girls' relationships with these. McRobbie's (1991/2000a) semiological analysis of the best-selling British teen magazine *Jackie* revealed that the magazine ideologically constructed teenage femininity around romance, fashion, beauty and pop and presented its readers with a

'romantic individualism' (p. 114) which stressed girls' individual efforts in the pursuit of romantic relationships and also the girl's need to comply with her male partner's wishes once she is in a relationship. However, despite the rigour of McRobbie's analysis and the alignment with the mainstream feminist critique of girls' magazines (Driscoll, 2002), her work was criticised for the simple 'interpretation of *Jackie* as a monolithic ideological construction of adolescent femininity' (van Zoonen, 1994, p. 25), which lacks a sophisticated theoretical exploration of girls' real readings and use of *Jackie*.

Van Zoonen's critique highlights how, first, the preoccupation with uncovering gender ideologies fails to identify and acknowledge the possible pleasure of reading magazines and, second, textual analysis offers very little insight into how audiences make sense of media content. Seeking to address the problematic feminist dismissal of women's pleasure in media consumption, Tania Modleski (1982), in her book *Loving with a Vengeance*, adopts a psychoanalytic approach to analysing the texts of 'soaps', Gothic novels and romances. Her argument goes beyond a simple critique of ideologies and asserts that women's reading pleasure, derived from the fantasy and desire offered by these genres, offers in complex ways temporary, symbolic solutions to their real problems. This focus on pleasure and fantasy enables a more nuanced and contextualised perspective on girls' and women's relationships with the media, as previously illustrated in Walkerdine's example of the working-class 'Minipops' whose performances can be understood from various competing discourses. all of which claim to have females' best interests at heart.

The problems of textual determinism raised by van Zoonen are balanced by audience research that focuses on audience pleasures, for instance Janice Radway's book *Reading the Romance* (1984). Radway's interviews with avid female romance readers show that, despite the conservative patriarchal values of romance novels, they provide an escape from the pressures and banality of domestic life. Radway construes romance reading as these women's 'declaration of independence' (p. 6), as well as 'individual resistance' (p. 10) to their traditional, prescribed gender role in the household. Contrary to the conclusions likely reached by textual analysis, that readers accept the patriarchal ideologies wholesale, Radway concludes that these women's interpretation of romance

texts is actually polysemic. Also, rather than simply subscribing to the heroine's subordination to the male hero, what these readers get out of the texts is the heroine's independence and capacity to 'tame' the hero, thus contributing to their sense of self-worth in their everyday domestic lives.

Despite Radway's laudable effort to listen to audiences of romance novels, her approach has been criticised. Ang (1996) points out that Radway's interpretation of romance reading as a symbolic resistance reflects her belief in the pedagogical purpose of feminist research and her view of feminism as a superior fixer of problems. What Ang calls for, in addition to a continuing critique of the ideologies in romances, is validation of 'the significance of the craving for and pleasure in romantic feelings that so many women have in common and share' (p. 107). Similarly, McRobbie (1997) admits that her work on *Jackie* was flawed in the sense that ideology does not work in a 'mechanical' way, and suggests that conventional feminist critiques that condemn girls' magazine reading do not suffice to explain the popularity of these magazines among girls, but only heighten the opposition between feminists and 'ordinary' women.

Arguing along similar lines, Driscoll (2002) notes that feminists often turn to the nonconformist consumption of subcultural girls in order to discover resistance and thereby agency. However, this redefinition of (subcultural) consumption as resistant is itself problematic because of the risk of granting superiority to subcultural (and hence authentic) consumption at the expense of neglecting what more ordinary 'conformity might entail or produce' (p. 278). She points out that girls' magazines, and girl culture more generally, involve a variety of uses and practices and operate within a circulation of things that 'girls can do, be, have, and make' (p. 278), producing a tension between agency and conformity. Driscoll urges us to rethink whether locating conformity, consumption and the mainstream at one end of the spectrum, and resistance, production, authenticity and subculture at the other is adequate to address girls' and women's media cultures.

As access to media technology increases and production becomes easier, many feminists see media production as an empowering and 'liberatory practice' for women

(Kearney, 2006, p.125). Researchers recognise the importance of studying how adolescent girls articulate and negotiate their gender and sexual identity through the internet (Mazzarella, 2005; Stern, 2002; Polak, 2006; Stern, 2007). Adopting a textual approach to investigating pre-adolescent and young adolescent girls' websites, Reid-Walsh & Mitchell (2004) allude to the 'physical room' in Virginia Woolf's famous essay 'A Room of One's Own,' and conceive of girls' websites as semi-private places of creativity and sociality and sites of 'virtual bedroom culture' (p. 174), which allow them to negotiate and resist. Others have remarked that adolescents' homepages exemplify their identity construction and are analogous to bedroom-wall decorations (Chandler & Roberts-Young, 1998; Stern, 2004). The 2008 survey of Taiwanese youth media use found that the percentage of girls with online albums and/or blogs was around twice that of boys (Fubon, 2008). Surveys conducted in the US (Lenhart, Madden, Macgill, & Smith, 2007) show that, online, girls dominate blog-writing (35% compared with 20% of online boys) and photo-posting (54% compared with 40% of online boys), a trend that began in 2005. The fact that more girls engage in self-authoring content online is further evidence of the idea that 'girls' virtual bedroom culture' is on the rise.

However, it should be noted that, in articulating female subjectivity, engaging in the subject position of media producer is only a first step towards empowerment. Productive activities are by no means the equivalent of resistance or subversion, but only points of departure from which agency and power may be examined. Nevertheless, girls' media production activities posit potential progressive efforts that may indicate 'a feminist consciousness and praxis occurring at younger ages than previously imagined' (Kearney, 1998, p. 290).

2.6.2 Play and identity

A concept that may be useful for analysing girls' media production, and that acknowledges their agency in the process of meaning-making and identity work without the presumption of conformity or resistance, is 'play'. In the narrowest sense, as Kehily (2007) explains, play is conceptualised as trivial, not serious and unproductive, fit (only) for children because it helps with the development of skills and abilities, but unfit for

youth because it is suggestive of their incompetence as emerging adults. However, Bloustien (2003) argues that, in a broader sense, play is essential to all human activity because it is a means by which we cope with uncertainty. When it becomes more formalised, it is referred to as 'rituals' (p.3) and is usually examined - in the case of youthful play - in the contexts of leisure, pleasure and consumption activities in relation to its role in helping youth to forge identifications, connections and perspectives which may have an influence on them as individuals (Kehily, 2007).

Play has a particularly important implication for the formation of gender identity. Thorne's (1993) study of American boys and girls aged 9-10 notes that children tend to form same-sex friendships and that their groups serve to sustain gender boundaries - a practice Thorne calls 'borderwork'. Thomas's (2007) research on the engagement of 60 young people in an online role-playing game and a chat world called 'Palace' also reveals 'borderwork' in operation. She argues that Palace offers these youths a place to 'play' with the visual and verbal aspects of their avatars and to express and perform their desires and fantasies, while simultaneously being the audience that provides feedback on their performance. Thomas observes 'hyperbolic exhibitions' of gender, as Butler terms them, in the young people's role-playing and verbal interaction. For instance, girls tend to giggle more, while boys tend to discuss masculine topics. Girls' avatars tend to be highly sexualised in terms of their ideals, to reflect their own desires and sexualities. Contrary to easy feminist critiques of the site's encouraging girls to comply with ideologies of feminine bodies, Thomas expresses surprise at girls' adeptness at 'exploiting the medium to perform their desires' (p. 128) and contends that, with proper digital literacies, this site could actually provide 'empowerment, relative freedom, originality, exploration and reinvention' (ibid.) for those who are marginalised in other aspects of their lives offline. Her findings support Butler's (1990) idea that we may consider identity as performing the fantasy and desire of what we hope to become.

In Bloustien's (2003) ethnographic study of ten Australian teenage girls, she studies the roles of play and reflexive self-representation through video cameras in the ongoing constitution of identity, and particularly 'how girls' representations become "fact" for them' (p.13). She construes the girls' play with roles, poses, fantasies and

images of themselves not as intentional resistance, but as an 'earnest endeavour[s]' (p.13) to explore and push the boundaries within 'perceived or internalized structural constraints' (p.12). Such play with image and identity, mediated by the video camera, is simultaneously unnerving and liberating, and resembles playing with and testing an elastic band to its limit of tension without letting it snap (p. 35). It is through asking questions about girls' constant boundary play—in the forms of checking, exploring, pushing and occasionally dangerously transgressing (what Livingstone (2008) calls 'risky opportunities') - that we can learn about the relationship between internet self-portraiture, gender and girls' identity work.

2.6.3 Commercialism and 'girl power'

In the early 1990s, a largely white, middle-class women's movement group in the US who called themselves Riot Grrrls first coined what has become the everyday term 'Girl Power'. The term initially had political implications and celebrated girls' assertive potential, and sought to reconstitute girl culture as a positive force (Gonick, 2006). It has been co-opted by Western popular culture and the commercial media and stripped of its political and feminist meanings, and is generally used to invoke images of girls as sassy, fun, fashionable and simultaneously agentic. It is exemplified by the British pop group the Spice Girls and the American show 'Buffy the Vampire Slayer'. Some feminist scholars consider that, despite the hyper-commercialisation of the Girl Power discourse, its frequent invocation of feminism has the positive mainstreaming effect of at least 'sell[ing] feminism as compatible with many traditional roles for girls' (Driscoll, 2002, p. 281). Others criticise the Girl Power discourse as anti-feminist, post-feminist, overemphasising individual power and consumer power without attending to the possibility of changing power relationships (Taft, 2004). As Griffin (2004) puts it 'Girl Power has/had a style, and that involved lots of makeup and glitter and wearing tight clothes…and crop tops…'(pp. 33-34), a practice that discriminates against and excludes girls who feel self-conscious about their bodies. Girl Power can also be framed as 'softer, sexier, less active than feminism and … gives feminism a "kick up the arse" by emphasizing beauty and appearance' (Taft, 2004, p. 71). Feminism is represented in the 'pro-feminist' (Griffin, 2001) tone of Girl Power as 'been there, done that' and hence

redundant, ready to be pushed off the table. This 'taken into accountness' is precisely what McRobbie (2004) calls the double entanglement of feminism: a contradictory coexistence of non-conservative values with regard to gender and sexuality – which is part of the liberalisation process – with a superficial acknowledgment of feminism for the sole purpose of immediately dismissing it.

Recalling Giddens's and Foucault's contrasting views of the relation between structural power and the agency of the self, McRobbie (2009) draws on their concepts to examine the contemporary so-called post-feminist socio-cultural landscape in which a 'normalisation of pornography' and 'hyper-culture of commercial sexuality' (pp. 17-18) take place. Using the term 'female individualisation' (p. 18), she explains:

> [Y]oung women …are …charged with the responsibility of self-organisation, and of playing
> an active role in creating the kind of individualised structures which will secure and service
> their own dis-embedded careers and pathways (McRobbie, 2009, p. 45).

Commercial domains such as media, beauty, fashion, body culture, etc., she argues, have replaced traditional patriarchal authority to become the new governmentality, which, through reference to feminist discourses such as agency and independence, imposes on young women a particular set of feminine cultural norms and encourages them to work towards 'self-perfectibility (i.e. self-completion)' (p. 63) without questioning patriarchal, heterosexual norms. In this sense, young women, now overwhelmed with capacity, are the 'can do' girls (Harris, 2004b) who appear agentic, independent and sexually powerful. Difficult questions about homogenous beauty ideals, constraints and inequality are muted by the pseudo-empowering discourse of choice and autonomy (Walkerdine, Lucey, & Melody, 2001; Gill, 2008). More problematically, Walkerdine et al. argue in the case of working-class girls that the discourse implicitly describes a successful achievement of ideal femininities as resulting from individual efforts, thereby suggesting that the individual can only blame him- or herself for lack of success, thus creating pain and anxiety.

As part of female individualisation, Gill (2007a; 2008) examines specifically the portrayal of female sexual agency in advertisements and argues for a shift from sexual

objectification to sexual subjectification. She defines 'sexual subjectification' as constructing femininity around the notions of sexual confidence and autonomy. This phenomenon is exemplified by the T-shirt from the French Connection FCUK brand with the slogan 'Fit Chick Unbelievable Knockers'. This sexual subjectification is problematic for several reasons. Firstly, media representations of women as desiring sexual subjects only include women whose appearance conforms to the preferred social expectations of being young, attractive and slim; other women are excluded as if they do not deserve the same sexual agency. It thus appears that sexual subjectification is a 'highly specific and exclusionary practice…it is the power of sexual attractiveness that is important' (2008, p.44). This point is illustrated in a plus-size girl's online self-portraits that I came across during my data collection process. The album owner was a plus-size female in her early twenties. Her self-portrait postures and compositions largely resemble those of girls whose albums are listed as 'hot picks' on Wretch homepage, and whose Guestbooks are flooded with messages saying 'Oh I adore you', 'Can we be friends? Here's my MSN', etc. However, the comments made by visitors to this plus-size girl's album were overwhelmingly destructive ones like 'You disgust me!', 'Shame on you! Why don't you kill yourself'. This case illustrates that, while we rejoice over girls' media production online in this contemporary 'politics of representation' (Kearney, 1998), it is equally important to be mindful of how class, education, sexuality, appearance, etc. may privilege some, but not others, thus amplifying some selected girls' voices while muting those of others.

The second problem with sexual subjectification is that the representation of women as freely choosing agents does not explain young women's increasingly homogeneous preference for particular 'looks'. Gill (2003) suggests that what used to be an external, judging male gaze is now internalised as the new disciplinary regime of a self-policing gaze. This self-subjectification is more exploitative than traditional objectification because it employs the discourse of empowerment, or 'power femininity' (Lazar, 2006, p. 21), to interpellate female subjects; at its worst, it may contribute to psychological distress, to shame, anxiety, excessive self-consciousness and self-surveillance, and to pathological problems such as eating disorders and depression (Calogero, Herbozo & Thompson, 2009; Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; Knauss, Paxton,

& Alsaker, 2008; Moradi & Huang, 2008), and, on a social-cultural level, to a regression to more severe sexism (Nowatzki & Morry, 2009), and an 'un-doing' of feminism (McRobbie, 2008) that renders feminist critique more complicated and difficult.

Elaborating on the public visibility of young women and the demand for self-surveillance in an era of confessional culture and celebrity, Harris (2004) observes that 'visibility and display are both the medium and the message of young women's cultural and leisure products' (p. 127). In particular, internet and digital photographic devices such as webcams facilitate as well as reinforce the idea that even the ordinary girl can have her 'fifteen minutes of fame' if she bares her private life to public eyes. Websites that offer live streaming video of girls' private practices exemplify this trend of normalising 'the insertion of the public gaze' (p. 130) and demand constant (physical and/or psychical) self-exposure, which monitors and encourages self-regulation. However, the recurring problem of the 'hierarchy of who is able to be seen where' (p. 130) in the post-feminist media landscape remains adamant and implicit. Here, Foucault's panopticon concept may be instructive in considering the case of girls' self-portraiture. The girls who self-portray put themselves under a spotlight, as in a well-lighted cell, which makes them vulnerable to the gaze, and also invites the gaze of an invisible audience of users sitting behind their computer screens. The 'visitor trackback' feature on Wretch, allows album-owners to see the username or IP of visitors. It seems fair that the album-owner can see the visitors who are seeing them, but the implication of this feature is that the individual is policing the self and the self's surveyors.

The commercial context in which girls' self-portraiture takes place is an important structural element that enables content creation by providing the service, but frames the individualisation within the popular discourse of beauty – translated as cute, sexy and slim. Since it emerged in 1999, Wretch Album has been well-known for its collection of 'beautiful chicks' (jheng` mei`) photos. Since Yahoo acquired Wretch in 2007, its marketing strategy has centred on promoting consumerist values such as celebrity and beauty. In 2008, Wretch formally appointed a 'beautiful chicks hunter' (known as 'Editor R'), whose job involves a daily selection from the Wretch Albums of eight 'beautiful chicks' who then appear on the Wretch Album front page. In March

2009, Wretch launched an official blog called 'Wretch loves beautiful chicks'[22], on which Editor R writes about the 'beautiful chicks', or posts content produced by the girls themselves. Editor R, in 2008, wrote on the Wretch 'office blog' that 'Frontpage is the façade of a website, of course we would bring in beautiful chicks to show their face… The editors' job is to find out the content that users wish to see the most'. Through the various promotional activities centred around 'beautiful chicks', Wretch encourages self-exposure, perfection and beauty. The discourse of 'becoming a beautiful chick' is ubiquitous in Wretch's advertisements and official activities, suggesting that beauty is a desirable quality and, with some individual effort, is feasible for everyone. Posing as a 'beautiful chick', then becomes a stylised online enactment of a particular femininity, which operates as the 'technology of the self' (Foucault, 1982) and serves to regulate the identity of being not simply a girl, but a 'beautiful chick'.

However, as Buckingham's (2009) assessment of the impact of the commercial world points out, the commercial market makes available 'many opportunities in terms of entertainment, creativity, communication, learning and cultural experience that they [children] would not otherwise have' (Buckingham, 2009 p. 76), and children themselves cannot be described simplistically as 'cultural dupes' or savvy consumers, since they actually have diverse reactions to commercial or sexualised messages. We could say that what Wretch does is merely to select 'how women can be profitably pictured' (Goffman, 1979, p. 25), and that girls' responses to the normative beauty discourse may be more diverse than a dichotomous acceptance or resistance. It is against this backdrop of commercialism and narrow definition of beauty that I examine girls' practice of self-portraiture online.

2.7   Research Questions

Since adolescence is a time when girls are increasingly confronted with womanhood issues (Basow & Rubin, 1999), it is not surprising that some girls experience conflicts over sexuality, body image, self-esteem, future career plans, etc.

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[22] http://www.wretch.cc/blog/wretchbeauty.

Basow and Rubin suggest looking at the strategies girls use to make sense of their female subjectivity, and the strengths these strategies provide. There is a plethora of research on girls' various forms of cultural production facilitated by (new) media technologies, including film-making, zine activity, website construction, blog writing, social networking profile creation, etc. (c.f. Mazzarella & Pecora, 2007). Prevalent in this body of work is a celebratory voice that rejoices in the 'discovery' and acknowledgment of girls' agentic roles in cultural activities and the potential rejuvenation of feminism, which resembles the excitement displayed in the 1980s over the discovery of female pleasure and resistance in media reception studies. What can we learn from the arguments that women's media pleasure is passive escapism or active resistance?

McRobbie (2008) suggests that the fact that feminism is taken into account in popular culture 'should not be a cause for celebration but rather a critical departure point' (p. 229) for an examination of how this new form of power and discipline works. In an investigation of girls and their self-portraiture, the question becomes how we examine the boundary-exploring and sometimes risky practice of self-portraiture. Also, how do we approach the occasional provocative self-portraiture without resorting to 'moralism and sexual conservatism' (p. 230)?

Is it possible to acknowledge girls' agency by moving beyond the opposition between optimism-agency and pessimism-exploitation while still grasping the dialectical process of girls' cultural practices? This thesis research uses the most popular SNS in Taiwan, Wretch, as a case study of young girls' self-portraiture online. The heart of this thesis is the in-depth analysis of girls' self-portraiture, but in order to understand girls' practices within the wider context of all Taiwanese young people's self-portraiture, some understanding of boys' self-portraits is also necessary for two reasons: firstly, to map out the bigger scene of young people's self-portraiture in Taiwan, and secondly, to have a reference point with which to identify the commonalities and differences in girls' and boys' self-portraits, which would in turn signpost themes that are worth pursuing in-depth with regard to girls' practices.

The core research question introduced in Chapter 1 is: how do girls practise self-portraiture online, and what role does this practice play in their identity work? This question is investigated as four sets of research sub-questions that form the subjects of the four empirical chapters:

- First, how do Taiwanese teenagers represent themselves through self-portraits online? In particular, do teenage girls and boys portray themselves in gender-specific ways?

- Second, in times of changing personal photographic practices and aesthetics, what is the role of online photo-sharing within girls' interpersonal communication?

- Third, how do girls explore aspects of identities through self-portraiture, and what do these various kinds of self-presentation mean to them?

- Fourth, how are gendered identities constructed and performed in and through self-portraiture? How do girls understand sexualities in their self-portraiture?

2.8   Conclusion

The first part of the chapter introduced the key concepts for exploring girls' identity work. It discussed approaches to 'identity' and identity work in psychology and sociology, drawing on theorists such as Erikson, Goffman and Giddens. Because these approaches do not address the gender aspect of identity, Butler's gender performativity theory is used as a way of understanding the construction of gender identity. After a review of identity theories, a discussion was provided regarding how CMC and social networking sites are used for the online identity work of exploration and interpersonal communication. The second part of the chapter shifted the focus from identity in general to a discussion of children's agency, which is not fully acknowledged in theories of identity, but advocated in the new sociology of childhood. Based on the need to take

account of children's agency and voice in their cultural practices, the discussion moved to the key arguments in feminist and girlhood media consumption and production, in order to situate the analysis of girls' online media production within current theoretical debates. Debates on commercialism and female empowerment were discussed in order to provide a critique of girls' gender identity work taking place in a commercial context. This chapter concluded by setting out the four research sub-questions used to explore girls' online self-portraiture in terms of: representational styles; interpersonal communication and social relations; self-presentation and identity exploration; and gender identity and sexuality.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1   Introduction

This thesis research is aimed at understanding how girls practise self-portraiture online and the role of self-portraiture in their lives, with particular attention to their interpersonal relations and to personal and gender identities. The chapter provides an explanation of how the methodological approach – a mixed method approach of content analysis, semi-structured interviews and online observation – was chosen and how the fieldwork was carried out. Section 3.2 is a detailed discussion of the rationale for the methodological approach and how the research questions are operationalised for the empirical work. Section 3.3 introduces the research design and Section 3.4 describes the data collection methods and procedures. Section 3.5 discusses the legal and ethical considerations that informed and also confined the research design and fieldwork. The final Section 3.6 offers a reflection on the methods and the fieldwork.

3.2   Rationale for the Methodological Approach

3.2.1 From research questions to methodology

As discussed in Section 1.3, despite the popularity of the practice of 'internet self-portraiture' among young people in Taiwan, popular understanding of their self-portraiture – what their self-portraits look like, and why they practice self-portraiture – is primarily informed by the media's sensational accounts, and this is problematic for two reasons. Firstly, knowledge about what young people's self-portraits look like is based on an impressionistic survey, rather than systematic analysis. Secondly, the explanation of why young people practice self-portraiture is based on adults' assumptions, guesswork and anecdotal accounts, rather than from young people's own perspectives. As a result, young people who practice self-portraiture are depicted as narcissistic, revealing too much (skin) online, and being addicted to the internet. While this may be true for some youth, it does not provide a balanced account of the meanings and use of how self-portraiture is practiced by young people, whose experiences are more ordinary than extraordinary. To amend for the lack of comprehensive understanding of both the

products (self-portraits) and experiences of the producers (young people), this thesis is committed to studying young people and self-portraiture in their own 'field of action': examining the self-portraits produced by them, and listening to the stories behind these photographs as told by them.

Sub-question 1 investigates the ways in which teenagers represent themselves online, and seeks to see the balance of teenagers' self-portraits overall. It is a response to the lack of insight about young people's general visual self-representation online, so that our understanding need not be swayed by the particular types of images that popular media or interview participants talk about, which should not necessarily be taken as typical. In order to see the styles of representation that are used at a macro level by teenagers as a whole, quantitative content analysis is employed, as it is often used to map the broad landscape of media content based on a systematic analysis that is guided by a pre-identified analytical framework.

However, studying the digital content produced by young people without going beyond the analysis of their artefacts, as Stern (2008) argues, is to deny young people's agency – it cannot meaningfully identify the opportunities offered by the digital media, nor can it reveal the complexities of their activities online. Sub-questions 2 to 4 address the core concern of this thesis by investigating the practices of self-portraiture, and therefore demand that the focus shifts to teenage girls – the doers of self-portraits – as the subject of analysis, in order to see how interpersonal communication, identity exploration and gendered identities are played out in their self-portraiture. Given the relative newness of studies into girls' online media production, qualitative research is needed if we are to gain in-depth understanding of girls' experiences and practices of self-portraiture, which is still under-studied. Furthermore, the theoretical framework adopted, as discussed in Chapter 2, focuses on the performative and constructivist aspects of identity work, and therefore calls for the need to hear participants' own 'voices' regarding their thoughts and understandings of their practices, and to see participants' own media production (self-portraits) in order to contextualise their own accounts within a world (online album space) constructed by them. The qualitative

approach of interviewing and observation is thus considered ideal to address the specific research sub-questions 2 to 4.

In summary, a singular focus on either self-portraits as texts or teenagers as producers is likely to be limited because it does not see the 'forest' (the big picture of teenagers' self-portraits) and the 'trees' (individual girl's practice of self-portraiture) at the same time, and does not juxtapose products and production stories in order to examine the dyadic relation between them. The theoretical underpinnings of identities as construction, presentation and performativity require examination both of the product and of the process of self-portraiture. A single research method is insufficient to facilitate this investigation with its multiple focuses. I therefore employ a mixed methods approach that includes quantitative content analysis and qualitative in-depth interviews, in order to encompass both the breadth of young people's self-portraiture and the depth of teenage girls' self-portraiture practices. The specific rationale of using mixed methods and an elaboration of how they complement each other is provided in the following section.

3.2.2 Complementary use of mixed methods

The research addresses the 'how' and 'why' of teenage girls' practice of self-portraiture on the basis of separate, but related questions about the broader patterns of self-representation and girls' use of self-portraiture for interpersonal communication and to make sense of identity and girlhood. Investigating these questions requires multiple methods, in both quantitative and qualitative traditions, in order to gather different data to answer aspects of these questions. While some scholars argue that quantitative and qualitative approaches involve different epistemologies and distinct paradigms, assumptions and research practices and therefore should not be juxtaposed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003), others believe that paradigms are not permanently fixed, that different epistemologies can operate within the same theoretical framework (Jensen, 2002, p. 258) and that, in most cases, combining methods across paradigms may be more useful (Lobe, Livingstone, Olafsson, & Simoes, 2008). Indeed, using mixed

methods is becoming more and more popular in social science, and is considered by some to be the third approach alongside the established dichotomous quantitative or qualitative research (Clark, Creswell, Green, & Shope, 2008).

Mixed methods research is defined by the *Journal of Mixed Methods Research* as 'research in which the investigator collects and analyses data, integrates the findings and draws inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches or methods in a single study or program of inquiry' (Teddlie, Tashakkori, & Johnson, 2008, p. 390). The main rationales for using mixed methods, according to Lobe, Livingstone, and Haddon (2007), are triangulation – using multiple methods, datasets, investigators or theories to study the same subject, and complementarity – using multiple methods to examine different aspects of a research phenomenon. In both cases, the results from multiple methods should enable the 'incremental building of knowledge' (Clark et al., 2008, p. 366) in order to contribute to an overall interpretation. Since this study seeks to understand overall trends as well as individual girls' everyday practice of self-portraiture, the complementary use of several different data sources (a large sample of teenagers' self-portraits, participant girls' self-portraits, participants' accounts of engaging in self-portraiture, observation of updating activities on their SNS space) is considered necessary. Complementary methods are common in childhood and youth research because these can provide a 'more holistic approach to measurement, analysis and interpretation' (Lobe et al., 2007, p. 14) of children's and young people's experiences that might otherwise not be possible with a single method.

As stated in the beginning of this chapter, to explore the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the general online self-portraiture phenomenon, and to understand specifically *teenage girls'* self-portraiture through several kinds of qualitative data, this thesis research begins with quantitative techniques, which 'condense data in order to see the big picture' (Ragin, 1994, p. 92), in order to map the overall landscape of self-portraiture and to identify issues to follow up and investigate more deeply in the qualitative study. The second phase employs qualitative techniques, which 'put flesh on the bones of quantitative results, bringing results to life through in-depth case elaboration' (Patton, 1990, p. 132), and thus will provide explanations for and

elaboration of the general understanding gleaned from the quantitative phase. Because the methods were executed consecutively in two phases, this constitutes a 'sequential explanatory design' (Ivankova, Creswell, & Stick, 2006).

In the first phase of the project, a quantitative content analysis of teenagers' self-portraits on the social networking site Wretch was conducted in order to identify prominent styles of representation relating to gender. The findings from the quantitative analysis include comparable statistical results and overall trends, which highlight some salient points that would then inform the design of the interview questions for the qualitative phase. The second phase is a qualitative study of 42 girls who practise self-portraiture and post self-portraits on Wretch Album. In-depth interviews were employed as the primary research method, augmented by field observation, in order to learn about girls' engagement in terms of degree, meaning, nature and contexts. The findings from the small sample are then corroborated by the large-scale quantitative study so that specific aspects of the quantitative results can be explained, and 'the scale and significance' (Livingstone & Bober, 2004, p. 8) of the contextual qualitative findings can be judged against the quantitative results. The methods employed in this study enable me to ask different but related questions, and their reciprocal strengths enhance the quantity and comprehensiveness of the knowledge on teenage girls' self-portraiture. The specificities of how the research questions were operationalised are explained in Section 3.2.3.

3.2.3 'Girl-method' as a 'sensitivity'

Another methodological concern in this research on teenage girls is the ways we think about our relations with the participants – who are females, and who are young – how to let their voice be heard, and how to conduct the research while remaining sensitive to issues common in and unique to feminist and child/youth research. Mitchell and Reid-Walsh (2009) use the term 'girl-method' to describe the 'methodologies …and methods in girl-centred research that assumes a political stance of defending and promoting the rights of girls' (p. 215). This 'method' is situated at the intersection between research interests and ethical concerns related to feminist research and child/

youth studies and, as a result, it challenges the male-centred and adult-centred bias in research traditions. Whether the 'girl-method' – or girlhood studies – constitutes a new epistemological perspective is beyond the scope of this thesis, however, it is useful to think of the 'girl-method' as a 'sensitivity' that reminds us to be alert to these two sets of concerns in the formulation and operation of the research.

The first set of concerns has its origins in feminist research. Feminist methodologies have spotlighted traditionally male-centred bias, problematising wider issues relating to socio-economic, racial and gender power dynamics in the research process. In the 1970s and 1980s, feminists began to question whether the positivist and inherently masculine frameworks of research were suited to studying women's everyday lives. In Ann Oakley's (1981/2005) classic criticism of male-centred bias, she criticised the textbook paradigm for its hierarchical researcher-researched relationship and exploitation of interviewees as simply 'objects of study/sources of data' (p. 218). She endorsed a 'relatively intimate and non-hierarchical relationship (p. 225), and encouraged an awareness of qualitative interviewing in order to allow women's voices to be heard. While Oakley had good intentions in suggesting that interviewees be treated as 'equals', Doucet and Mauthner (2008) caution that encouraging deep, non-hierarchical relationships with participating women for the purpose of creating a rapport that may facilitate the research may be more exploitative than the original paradigm. They argue that the power imbalance between researcher and participants may well be the result of structural characteristics other than gender, such as differences in class, ethnicity, age and sexuality. Naples (2003) argues that being an 'insider' or 'outsider' of a particular gendered, raced or classed identity and subjectivity is fluid, while Hiller and DiLuzio (2004) suggest an alternative conceptualisation of the interview process as a site where interviewer and interviewee collaborate to make meaning and forge identity through conversation about experiences. In short, although Oakley was criticised, her writing is nonetheless useful for highlighting the issues of researcher self-reflexivity and researcher-participant relationship that are of particular importance in feminist methodologies.

Another set of concerns stems from child and youth research. In the emphasis of sociology of childhood on seeing children/youth as competent agents actively participating in their everyday lives we can see a connection with girlhood studies, and why participation, voice and self-representation could occupy a central position in the girl-method. However, there may be considerable difficulties in eliciting information from children and youth because the age differential between adult researcher and child participant can lead adults to devalue children's cultural activities, and can lead children to 'self-censor' what they would have said and to say what they think is correct (Lobe, Livingstone, Olafsson, & Simoes, 2008). Therefore, as Mitchell and Reid-Walsh (2008) suggest, it is necessary to take account of the cultural artefacts produced by child/youth participants in order to elicit their relatively unrestrained descriptions of everyday engagement. However, commitment to a girl-centred approach and acknowledgement of girls' active roles in the research about girls' media culture should not, as Buckingham (2008) argues with regard to children and the media in general, lead us to the simplistic conclusion that they are agentic, because being active in meaning-making is only a prerequisite for engagement with the media.

In summary, what is 'sensitised' by the 'girl-method' in the present thesis is the call for attention to non-hierarchical research-participant relationships, and the importance of taking account of the cultural products of girls juxtaposed with what they say about their practice. In this research I considered these issues by giving participants equal – if not superior – control in the interview process, and by using their self-portraits as aids and resources to tease out their stories about self-portraiture. I elaborate on the specificities in Section 3.4.5.

3.2.4 Operationalising the research questions

The core research question set out in Chapter 1 was: 'how do girls practise self-portraiture online, and what role does this practice play in their identity work?'. The question was then broken down into four sub-questions, each with a different focus, and required a mixture of methods that span the quantitative and qualitative traditions. As

stated in Sections 2.6 and 3.2, Sub-question 1 is concerned with identifying the ways in which teenagers represent themselves in self-portraiture on a larger scale, and thus the purpose was best achieved through the quantitative method of content analysis, which facilitates systematic analysis of a large set of data. Sub-questions 2 to 4 share the same purpose of understanding self-portraiture practice from teenage girls' own perspectives, and therefore demanded the collection of a core body of data using qualitative methods that elicited the participating girls' own accounts of their experiences with self-portraiture. The interest of this thesis in the role that new media play in girls' culture and gender identity work demanded a focus on teenage girls, who are in an active phase of identity construction. Since online self-representation often takes place in an online environment where there is shared reception, SNS thus appear suitable for this kind of enquiry. The four research sub-questions were operationalised on the basis of the theoretical framework, and are outlined below in Table 2 in order to show the relations between research questions, key concepts that will be addressed in the empirical chapters and the data collected.

Table 2 Operationalisation of the research sub-questions

RESEARCH SUB-QUESTIONS	KEY CONCEPTS	METHOD(S) OF DATA COLLECTION	DATA FOR ANALYSIS
1. How do Taiwanese teenagers represent themselves through self-portraits online? In particular, do teenage girls and boys portray themselves in gender-specific ways?	- Self-representation - Gendered representations - Gender stereotypes	Phase 1 Quantitative: Content analysis	- Self-portraits and profile portraits of teenagers posted on Wretch Album that are publicly-accessible
2. In times of changing personal photographic practices and aesthetics, what is the role of online photo-sharing within girls' interpersonal communication?	- Personal photographs - Online photo-sharing - Interpersonal communication - Self-disclosure	Phase 2 Qualitative: - Online observations of participants' Album activities - Semi-structured	- Personal photographs (including self-portraits) posted - Girls' accounts of their personal photographic practices - Girls' design and use of the

	- Friendship - Connection	interviews	Album space
3. How do girls explore aspects of identities through self-portraiture, and what do these various kinds of self-presentation mean to them?	- Self-presentation - Impression management - Play - Personal identity - Project of the self - Privacy	Phase 2 Qualitative: - Online observations of participants' Album activities - Semi-structured interviews	- Self-portraits posted - Girls' accounts regarding the meanings of self-portraiture, impression management techniques, how they 'play' with self-image, and their use of privacy settings - Observation of girls' interactions with audiences
4. How are gendered identities constructed and performed in and through self-portraiture? How do girls understand sexualities in their self-portraiture?	- Gender identity - Performativity - Cute femininity - Beauty practices - Sexuality - Agency - Audience response and interaction	Phase 2 Qualitative: - Online observations of participants' Album activities - Semi-structured interviews	- Self-portraits posted - Girls' accounts regarding preferred style of representation, beauty practices, their thoughts and practices about sexiness - Observation of girls' interactions with audiences

3.3   Research Design

3.3.1 Quantitative phase: content analysis

Content analysis allows 'replicable and valid inferences from texts to the contexts of their use' (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 18). In this study, it is used to address Sub-question 1 in order to map the landscape of teenagers' self-portraits, which contributes to the knowledge about photographic self-representation online. Content analysis of a large sample (in this study, 100 boys and 100 girls) provided quantifiable accounts of how girls and boys in the same age-groups portray themselves, and is useful for identifying commonalities and differences in their practices. In addition, content analysis of a large sample served as a precursory method – an 'auxiliary strategy' (Schroeder, Drotner,

Kline, & Murray, 2003, p. 356) – that informs small-scale, in-depth interviews and observation of participants by identifying prominent themes that can be further pursued in the interviews. The results of the content analysis are juxtaposed with the qualitative findings in order to provide an account of teenage girls' self-portraiture online.

Content analysis was originally developed as a text-based quantitative method to measure the accuracy of news reports, but it does not exclude qualitative methods (or vice versa) (Krippendorff, 2004), nor is it incompatible with visual content analysis. In fact, content analysis can be a useful critical visual methodology, where the rules of content analysis enable researchers to avoid the bias of relying on 'unconscious strategies' (Rose, 2001, p.56), and reveal the patterns and structural categories in images that might otherwise be neglected (Emmison & Smith, 2000; Lutz & Collins, 1993). Some make the criticism that, in the process of analysing images systematically with a series of pre-determined codes that reflect research questions, images are reduced to codes and therefore may lose some of the detail in the original image. However, it should be remembered that the goal of content analysis is not to translate every detail from the original to the resulting frequencies. Valid codes will provide analytical connections between the text, the broader cultural context and the theoretical understanding of the text (Krippendorf, 2004; Rose, 2001). Therefore, translating images into codes is not a simplification as long as we ensure that in the reduction process the coding categories we use are 'enlightening' (Slater, 1998), so that the interpretation of results responds to the research question.

In the analysis process, content analysis 'deliberately restricts itself to measuring the manifest or "surface" content of the message' (Leiss, Kline, & Jhally, 1990, p.218) in order to make the descriptive coding categories applicable to all the data under examination and reduce the variations in different coders' interpretations. However, this does not mean that the results – numbers and frequencies – are mere superficial observation; in interpreting the findings the researcher's task is to give back to the body of data the context and social meanings of the codes, presented in an organised and systematic manner. Particularly important here is that the presence, as well as the absence, of frequencies of certain coding categories can shed light on the social

meanings and significance of these categories, helping the building of 'paradigms of potential meaning' (Bauer, 2000, p. 148). That is, while coding categories with higher frequency counts inform us of commonness, coding categories with lower counts should not be dismissed as insignificant - absence can be as informative as presence. Therefore, content analysis can illuminate what is being 'spoken', and what is *not* being spoken – on purpose or unconsciously – about gendered methods of self-representation in the self-portraits of teenagers.

While content analysis is useful for identifying patterns manifested in self-portraits, the method has some limitations related to its inability to explain the latent connotations of content or to reveal the contexts of production, for instance, why a self-portrait is presented as such, in what situational contexts these self-portraits are produced, what meanings they carry, and so on. To address these why and what questions, we need to use qualitative methods for explanation and elaboration.

3.3.2 Qualitative phase: interviews and observation

The qualitative analysis used in-depth interviews and observation to address Sub-questions 2 to 4, which examine the communicative, explorative and performative aspects of girls' self-portraiture practices. These methods are often employed in the ethnography tradition, although the ways in which this research makes use of these methods do not render this research ethnography. One of the defining features of ethnography, according to Creswell (2007), is its focus on a cultural-sharing group whose members interact with one another. In this study, the participants engage in the same cultural practice of online self-portraiture and do belong to the loosely defined online 'community' called Wretch, yet they do not interact with one another in the same way that community members (e.g. 'zine' producers or online forum members) do. For this reason, ethnography is not considered to be possible, or a suitable method for this study. However, this study does share ethnography's commitment to learning about participants' 'experience and the words, voice and lives … in the natural settings that participants occupy' (Skeggs, 2001a, p. 430) and, therefore, prioritised in the design and implementation of fieldwork unobtrusive observation and naturalistic interviews – a

particular advantage of ethnography conducted online (Kozinets, 2010) – over other more structured methods.

Selecting the number of participants

Since the purpose of the qualitative phase of study is to gain an in-depth understanding of girls' self-portraiture practices and how these relate to their identity work, it was decided that a small sample size would be acceptable, following the tradition in qualitative research of aiming to 'elucidate the particular, the specific' (Creswell, 2007, p. 126). Unlike quantitative research, which favours large sample size, a larger number of interviewees does not necessarily improve quality or understanding: at some point the researcher will identify common themes and new insights will cease to appear, reaching what Gaskell (2000, p. 43) calls 'saturation'. There is also a danger of a greater 'number and complexity of data', resulting in 'investigator …fatigue' in the analysis process (Ryan & Bernard, 2004, as cited in Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006, p. 77), the number of interviews should thus be manageable. Although small sample size and qualitative methods have been criticised for their inability to represent a wide range of people and their experiences (Kelly, Regan, & Burton, 1992), this is not a concern in the present context of exploring practices in depth. The intention, based on previous Internet studies and Girlhood studies (e.g. Thiel, 2005; Gleeson & Frith, 2004; Bury, 2005; Orgad, 2005; Bloustien, 2003), was a sample size of 15-20 teenage girls from a range of socio-demographic backgrounds, each of whom would be interviewed between two and four times over a short period. However, as the fieldwork progressed it became clear that the quality and usefulness of the interviews were being influenced by several factors, including the participants' interest in the research topic, the medium used for interviewing (Instant Messaging), the availability and willingness of participants to participate in follow-up interview(s), and the depth and quality of the interview(s). It was decided to continue recruiting to saturation point. The final sample was 42 girls who participated in the study with varying degrees of engagement. The sampling methods are explained in more detail in Section 3.4; Section 3.6 presents some methodological reflections.

Semi-structured in-depth interviews

In-depth interviews allowed information about the 'what, why, and how' (Kvale, 1996) of girls' self-portraiture practices and experience, as well as the contexts in which they were acting. Semi-structured – as opposed to structured or open-ended –interviews were considered most suitable because they allowed the researcher to ask participants a list of pre-determined questions based on the research questions, while conducting the interviews in a manner similar to a conversation (Rubin & Rubin, 1995), reflecting part of this project's commitment to assigning equal control over interviews to both parties, and to constructing a naturalistic setting in which participants might feel less inhibited about sharing. Semi-structured interviews give researcher and participants flexibility to pursue certain questions or topics, as happens in everyday conversations. This project also intended to conduct 'ongoing interviews' because this would allow the elicitation of detailed and nuanced discussions that 'fill in the biographical meanings' (Warren, 2002, p.85) of individual girls' self-portraiture and the relevant activities in the Wretch space. However, this proved challenging for several reasons, such as the logistical difficulty of arranging follow-up interviews, as well as participants' waning interest in participation after a prolonged period of time. This point is revisited in Section 3.6.

Instant Messaging interview

With the exception of two interviews that were conducted face to face, most interviews[23] were conducted via Instant Messaging (IM) software. IM is a synchronous, computer-mediated communication software that allows users to type or voice-chat in real time. Although synchronous interviews online have been used in a few studies (Chen & Hinton, 1999; O'Connor & Madge, 2001), this remains for some reason an unpopular method(O'Connor, Madge, Shaw, & Wellens, 2008). According to these scholars, the advantages of synchronous online interviews include: the ability to conduct real-time conversations while reducing the cost and effort related to travelling for face-to-face interviews; it reduces physical identity markers such as age, class, appearance

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[23] Interviews were conducted using an interview topic guide, which was built upon and improved from the pilot study interview guide (see Appendix 5).

which can affect rapport in positive or negative ways; interviews are automatically archived, hence removing the need for transcription. The disadvantages include: the requirement for access to a computer and familiarity with using the interview software – while participants in this study were all adroit users of the IM software, having undisturbed access to the computer was problematic in some cases; in face-to-face interviews, rapport can be built through shared characteristics (Robson, 1993), but the lack of physical identity markers means that rapport has to be built almost purely through verbal cues such as the style and tone of written language, use of 'teen language', etc. Also, the lack of paralinguistic cues such as 'morphological, dynamic and static aspects of posture or movement, facial expression, vocal qualities and miscellaneous (habits of dress, general tidiness, etc.)' (Oldfield, 1951, as cited in Chen & Hinton, 1999, para. 12.2) means that the researcher cannot use these as 'data' for interpretation and contextualisation of the interviews.

After weighing the pros and cons of IM interviews against the feasibility of conducting face-to-face interviews, IM interviews were chosen for three reasons. The first concerns issues of logistics and trust. Teenage girls may have limited flexibility and control in their personal schedules (between school, cram school or part-time job) and who they go out with. In addition, 'the internet' is often framed in the press as where girls befriend and fall prey to online predators whom they may then meet offline. Despite my best efforts to prove my identity to them by providing my LSE contact details, affiliation website, and my conference paper posted on the website of a Taiwanese academic conference, participants and parents/guardians could only verify to a certain extent my identity as a researcher.[24] Therefore, conducting interviews online appeared to be the sensible choice because participants and their parents/guardians were relieved of the worry of meeting a stranger (i.e. the researcher) face to face; online interviewing also allowed the participants more flexibility in fitting the interview into their schedules.

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[24] Even when I opted for online interviews, one participant's parent still expressed concern that he could not trust my real identity, and therefore refused to provide his contact details on the consent form.

Second, using IM was an attempt to simulate a communication atmosphere with which young people are comfortable and familiar in their everyday lives and to gain entry into their online cultural space through, for instance, their use of emoticons or expressions that are part of the larger youth online culture. As McKenna, Green and Gleason's (2002) term 'intimate internet' suggests, the relative anonymity of internet interactions reduces the risks and fear of disapproval in disclosing intimate details. Since this research explores self-portraiture – a practice that largely takes place in private and may pose intimate or awkward questions about femininity and sexuality, online interviews enabled an atmosphere in which participants felt relaxed and willing to share, all crucial for successful in-depth interviews (Kvale, 1996). In addition, because both participant and researcher had access to the internet during the conversation about their online self-portraiture practice, either of us could refer to the online examples when necessary. For example, we could look at a particular photograph in Wretch Album, examine frequently visited websites, look at Wretch front pages, etc., which in some cases enhanced mutual understanding and ensured that we were both - metaphorically and literally - 'on the same page'. Using the girls' photographs as an aid during the interview/conversation was helpful for 'breaking the ice' and encouraging them to share: the act of moving the discussion from the general to a focus on one of *their* photographs reinforced awareness that the research was interested in learning about them as individuals, about *their* specific experiences, stories and thoughts. When they appreciated that this was the level of detail in which I was interested, they tended to provide more elaborate responses.

Finally, this research respected participants' right to 'quit the study at any point should they wish to', as stated in the informed consent; this right is more easily exercised in IM than in face-to-face situations. Participants in face-to-face interviews can feel obligated to continue with the interview by the social protocol of politeness and the researcher's position as an adult. IM interviews give participants more communicative control, and they can easily abort an interview by not responding or simply going offline. (This characteristic of IM interviews, although convenient for participants, can be confusing for the researcher. This is discussed in more detail in

Section 3.6 - methodological reflections). For the reasons stated above, IM interviews were deemed more appropriate for eliciting less 'filtered' responses from participants about their experiences and practice, in a setting in which they were relaxed and reasonably in control.

Face-to-face interviews

Face-to-face interviews were conducted with two participants who were recruited through a personal network. One was a student of one of my relatives, and the other was the best friend of that student. I had not met or interacted with either prior to the interview. When given the choice of face-to-face or IM interviews both chose the former. In these two cases, there were no doubts about my status as a doctoral researcher rather than someone who had contacted them online for some other reason, and also meeting face-to-face at my home was easier for them to arrange logistically. The face-to-face interviews allowed non-verbal cues, and the interaction was smooth, but referring to online materials to probe and elaborate certain points was less spontaneous than in the IM interviews. In the face-to-face setting this required an interruption in the conversation to search for material, and participants were less relaxed about using my computer. This broke the flow, resulting in several awkward temporary silences. This did not in general apply to the IM interviews because any searching for materials was 'behind the scenes (screen)' and could be conducted when the other person was responding (typing their statement).

3.3.3 But is she being 'truthful'?

In the debate on qualitative studies conducted online a major issue is authenticity of participant identity and reliability of the information given (c.f. Leander & McKim, 2003; Hine, 2000). It has been argued that, without the physical cues in face-to-face interaction to confirm and verify the authenticity of a participant's identity and accounts, the researcher cannot determine whether the participant is telling the 'truth', whether to take the participant's account at face value or, most crucially, whether the participant is who she/he claims to be, given the disembodied nature of online verbal communication.

There are no straightforward answers, no proof of whether online interaction is more truthful or authentic than offline interaction, or vice versa. My view was that, since this study was concerned with how girls articulate themselves through the practice of self-portraiture, and with how they make sense of their lives through digital media more broadly, the way in which girls worked out the presentation of self in online interviews, at a meta level, would have the same significance as their photographic self-representation on their Wretch space. Both the visual and verbal content are, according to Goffman, 'signs given' in order to communicate to others about who they are and what they think in the online context, despite the differences in modes of communication.

Also, does a 'truthful account' really exist? Hastrup (1992) argues that the information given by participants is only a response to the researcher's presence, not 'truth'. Similarly, Hine (2000) suggests that '[s]tandards of authenticity … are situationally negotiated and sustained. … A search for truly authentic knowledge about people or phenomena is doomed to be ultimately irresolvable' (p. 49). These arguments would seem to suggest that, if a girl spends a lot of time and effort constructing a persona on her Wretch space that is different from her offline self, and if she manages to maintain this for a sustained period of time, it will not be possible to determine which of these personas is the more 'authentic'. However, I would feel confident that the online persona and its maintenance must be meaningful to her. It is precisely the process and the efforts involved in using the new media to express and understand one's identity that this project seeks to reveal. Hence, the fact that the participant's online identity may not be congruent with the offline identity does not pose a methodological challenge; rather it poses and allows us to ask the question of why such incongruence exists.

3.3.4 Non-participant observation

While interviews are instructive for obtaining participants' own responses to 'why' questions, their limitation is that they are the sole source of information on 'actions that occurred elsewhere in space and time' (Becker & Geer, 1957, cited in Gaskell, 2000, p. 44), separate from the original context. May (2001) states that people draw meanings for their actions from their immediate surroundings; to avoid framing the issue of interest

according to the researcher's perception of social reality, it is necessary to engage in the participants' own environment so that the researcher can share the participants' perspectives.

Girls' self-portraiture takes place both offline and online – offline is where the self-portraits are snapped, online is where they are shared, on their Wretch Albums. Given the ethical and logistical difficulties involved in meeting participants face to face, and the impossibility of witnessing their self-portraiture practices – which in the photographing phase are usually highly spontaneous and/or private, observation of the participants' Wretch space is an alternative way of contextualising their accounts, of triangulating their verbal descriptions and explanations with the actual products of self-portraiture and, as Gaskell (2000) notes, of learning about the 'local knowledge and culture' (p. 44).

In order to see participants' online self-portraits and networking in their natural state, I adopted the role of a 'lurker', which allowed me to view the Wretch Album space unobtrusively. In my first communication with the participants, I informed them that this was my intention and received from them written consent for my actions. With the exception of one activity,[25] I did not participate in any activities in their Wretch space. I immersed myself in the field of interest and took notes on their self-portraits and on activities such as album updates, blog posts (if available) and interactions with people in the Guestbook (the equivalent of the Facebook 'Wall'). The participants' photos can be conceived of as both 'visual records' and 'visual diaries' (Prosser & Schwartz, 1998); In the first case, they provided me with records of some aspects of the girls' lives, and in the second case they constituted 'field notes imbued with their producer's standpoint' (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2004, p.312), which allowed the inclusion of participants' voices and their participation in the generation of social knowledge about them, which is one of the goals in childhood studies (James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998).

My observation also had a practical purpose. It allowed me, prior to the interviews, to 'get to know' the participants – their personalities, self-portraiture styles, aesthetic

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[25] At the request of one participant I left a 'Happy Birthday' message on her Guestbook.

preferences, levels of use of Wretch, interests, friends – allowing greater rapport and better selection from the interview topic guide. It allowed me to phrase questions in ways that matched participants' observed personalities and communicative styles. In the case of follow-up interviews, I was able to ask questions about updates or changes to the Albums. Finally, since the role of observation notes is to support and enhance the understanding of contexts and practices, I did not code my notes systematically into themes, but used them as a reference in writing up.

3.4 Data Collection Methods and Procedures

Research on young people's self-representation on the internet has grown considerably since the advent of Web 2.0. Consequently, the proposed research was positioned within a newly established body of work and adheres to its conventions regarding sample size, mode of interviewing, topics covered and forms of analysis employed, adapted for the context of Taiwanese girls' self-portraiture. As stated in Section 2.7 and 3.2, this research sought to first map out in the first phase an overall view of what teenagers' self-portraits look like, but the emphasis remains placed in the second phase, which learned about the 'why' and 'how' in relation to teenage girls' identity work via online self-portraiture practice. Table 3 in Section 3.2.3 presents the two phases of the research. The first phase consisted of quantitative content analysis of 2,000 self-portraits collected from 100 boys and 100 girls. The second phase consisted of IM and face-to-face, in-depth interviews with 42 girls and observation of their Wretch space activities.

3.4.1 Selection of the field of research

Since the project is interested in teenage girls' online self-representation taking place in an environment that promotes the 'audiencing' of representations and interaction among users, a social networking site (SNS) seemed an appropriate Web 2.0 environment. There were three reasons for my choosing Wretch Album (www.wretch.cc/album) as the field of research. First, it is one of the most popular SNS in Taiwan. Wretch has a large body of users who engage in content-creation, audiencing

and interaction. Second, the high proportion of young users among Wretch users[26] makes it an appropriate context for studying teenagers' identity development, the influence of online social networks and other social-cultural factors. Third, Wretch is well known for its collection of 'beautiful chicks' photographs – either self-portraits or photos taken by others – which provides the perfect opportunity to study how teenage girls' agency plays out in their self-portraiture within this 'beautiful chicks' culture.

3.4.2 Data collection and analysis for Phase 1

The data refer to the self-portraits of teenagers posted on their individual Wretch Album space. In order to increase the variety of sampled self-portraits, I used a three-stage sampling method to gather data. First, from the categories 'Boys' personal photos' and 'Girls' personal photos' on the Wretch Album homepage, 100 girls and 100 boys aged between 12–18 were selected: 50 girls and 50 boys under 'random pick' conditions (see Figure 1), and another 50 girls and 50 boys under the 'hot' condition (see Figure 2). Second, ten self-portraits from each participant's featured album (i.e. the album featured by Wretch on the Front page) were randomly sampled, yielding a total of 1,000 girls' and 1,000 boys' self-portraits. It is important to note that only self-portraits that were publicly accessible were included in the sampling population.

The analysis of self-portraits was conducted using SPSS software. Cross-tabulation was used to show the relationship between gender and styles of representation in self-portraits. The chi-square test for independence was used to test the hypothesis that gender differences in styles of representation are statistically significant; cluster analysis was used to identify prominent styles of representation used by teenagers in self-portraits. Finally, based on clustering results, cross-tabulation was used to examine variance in styles of representation within each individual's ten sampled self-portraits. The sampling method and data analysis procedures are described in Chapter 4.

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[26] In terms of users' age composition, in 2011, 18% of Wretch users were aged between 10-19, 30% between 20-29, and 51% of users were aged over 30 – similar to Facebook user composition (IX Survey, 2011b).

Figure 1 Wretch Album front page showing the 'random pick' category

[This screenshot has been removed, as the copyright is owned by another organisation.]

Figure 2 Wretch Album front page showing the 'hot' category

[This screenshot has been removed, as the copyright is owned by another organisation.]

3.4.3 Participant recruitment for Phase 2

Teenage girls who post self-portraits on Wretch Album were considered potential participants for this research, and were approached using four methods. The first used the Wretch Album homepage as the portal for locating potential participants. First, I visited the 'girls' personal photos' section, and, under the respective display conditions of 'random pick' and 'hot', I looked for albums whose cover images were self-portraits of what appeared to be teenagers. I then visited the relevant Wretch Albums and Profiles to search for clues as to the girls' ages (between 12 and 18 years was the initial target age for this research). On the age-qualifying girl's Wretch Guestbook, I used my Wretch account to leave a message that stated my research objective – to investigate girls' uses and experiences with social media – and invited the girl to participate in the study. The details of participant briefing and informed consent procedures are explained in Section 3.4.4. Once a girl and her parent/guardian – if the girl was under 18 – had agreed to participation, the individual became a formal participant. This method, which was my main and preferred recruitment method, recruited 17 participants,[27] but proved time-consuming and unproductive for several reasons. First, the rate of response to my recruitment message was less than 1 in 30. Many potential participants who expressed initial interest dropped out when they discovered that participation required parental consent, and of those who agreed to continue only a small number produced the required parental consent.

As the first method proved unfruitful, I changed my strategy to recruitment through schools. I distributed a short survey about girls' attitudes to self-portraiture to female students in one class in a vocational high school A, to four classes in vocational high school B, to four classes in regular high school C, and to four classes in middle school D. The purpose of the survey was described as identifying girls who had posted self-portraits on Wretch and would be interested in joining the study. At the end of the

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[27] A pilot study conducted in 2008 used the same recruitment method, except that it did not require parental consent. Three participants from the pilot study also consented to be interviewed again for this thesis, and because they were of age when I contacted them again in 2011 parental consent was not sought. In the end I only managed to interview one of these girls, although all three girls' accounts from the pilot were included, with their consent, in the data analysis.

survey questionnaire, there was space for the respondent to leave her IM contact should she be interested in taking part. This method recruited 12 participants.

Nevertheless, response rates using this method were still low and I had to resort to other means. My personal network of relatives identified one participant, who then persuaded one of her friends to take part; these were the two participants that I interviewed face to face. Another friend who was a teacher also referred a student to me. Additionally, I used the snowball sampling method, asking girls who had already agreed to participate to introduce their friends; this yielded three more participants. Finally, in order to bypass parental consent – which appeared to be a major obstacle – I recruited four more participants aged 18-20 through a message posted on the 'WomenTalk' board of PTT (ptt.cc), the Taiwanese Bulletin Board System (BBS) with a very large body of registered users.

3.4.4 Participant briefing and ethics for Phase 2

I wanted to investigate girls' experience by 'acknowledging' it, by listening to them talk about their lives as they see them – an approach stressed in child-centred research (Livingstone, 2008). Following the ethical tradition of social research, I first sought consent from the participants and, since the majority were legal minors who are generally seen as vulnerable (Ess & Jones, 2004; LSE Research Ethics Policy, 2009), I also sought parental consent (recommended in the UK). However, the interest in girls' first-hand perspectives and respect for guardianship and girls' rights to privacy and autonomy posed a methodological challenge. Some young people are reluctant to share some parts of their lives, particularly solitary media use, with their parents/guardians (Larson, 1995). Stern (2004) points out that teens may see researchers' seeking of parental consent as a failure to respect their autonomy and 'authority in one of the few places they actually wield it' (p. 279).

In the pilot study for this project (where I only solicited the participating girls' consent), one participant, Mimi, told me that she did not let her parents know about her Wretch album because they believed posting personal photos online was an unsafe

practice. Had I asked her to obtain parental consent, she would not have agreed to be interviewed because it would have meant her parents knowing about her private practice of internet self-portraiture, which would have created tensions and infringed Mimi's privacy. Her account echoes Livingstone's (2008) argument that 'what for an adult … may seem risky, is for a teenager often precisely the opportunity that they seek' (p. 397). For this very reason, in order to respect the responsibilities of guardianship and girls' autonomy, some negotiation was necessary.

In my online method of recruitment on Wretch, I first posted an invitation message – informed by the AoIR recommendations (Ess & AoIR, 2002) and LSE informed consent guidance – on the Wretch Guestbook of potential participants. This invitation included a statement of the study objectives, namely 'to understand girls' uses and experiences of social media'. The same information, in print or electronic forms, was given to participants recruited through the other methods described above. Girls were invited to join the study by emailing me, or by adding the provided IM account in order to have further discussion through IM. I contacted those who replied, by email, giving my name and academic affiliation in order to establish my identity, credibility and research purpose. Those who responded in writing expressing their willingness to participate were sent - by email[28] - two different consent forms for the participant and for her legal guardian, giving clear information about the project and what participation would involve. The consent forms were designed to be clear to teenagers (see Appendix 2-4), and based on a design used in the UK Children Go Online project (Livingstone & Bober, 2004).

Since many potential participants and guardians were unlikely to have the software/equipment/knowledge to enable a digital signature, and since signatures – whether electronic or in hard copy – were difficult for me to verify, I asked only that the parent/guardian should add to the electronic consent form her or his name, a contact phone number or email address and the child's Wretch account name, and return the form to me via email. Admittedly there was a loophole whereby the girls themselves

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[28] They were also given the option of receiving and returning hard copies of the consent form, but no one chose this method due to its relative inconvenience.

could 'forge' parental consent; however, since participation in the research was unlikely to cause the participants harm and since, due to the methodological difficulties, there was not much more I could do to guard against lack of parental consent, I decided to trust the consent forms that were returned to me.

3.4.5 Data collection methods for Phase 2

In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted mainly via IM software such as MSN messenger or Yahoo! Messenger. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with two participants at their request. One other participant was 'interviewed' by email.[29] The number of interviews with each participant varied between one and four, depending on their willingness, interest and availability. The interviews followed a semi-structured protocol, and each session lasted for an hour on average. IM interviews were automatically recorded by the IM software as conversation logs; face-to-face interviews were recorded using my laptop and transcribed by me. The interview protocol included questions about participants' digital media use for leisure and social interaction, use of Wretch Album, reasons why individuals posted self-portraits online, how they decided which personal photos (including but not limited to self-portraits) to share, their management of Wretch Album, their 'reading' of their own and others' self-portraits, how they felt about and responded to feedback and comments, etc. (See Appendix 6 for interview protocol). Follow-up interviews asked about updates to Album activities.

Observation of participants' Wretch Albums took place prior to and in parallel with the interviews. I became a non-participant 'lurker' on the Wretch website and took notes about girls' Wretch activities that are open to public view. This allowed me to observe participants in their undisturbed natural state (Paccagnella, 1997). Before and during the interview periods, I spent some time looking at the Wretch space of the participants concerned – including photo albums, blogs and profile pages – to get a sense of the kind of photos they shared, the topics they blogged about, what they considered

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[29] The participant said she was happy to share her thoughts, but preferred to be 'interviewed' over email because she was preparing for her college entrance exam. I then designed an open-ended email questionnaire for her to fill in and return (See Appendix 8).

necessary parts of their self-introduction in the profile, styles employed on the Wretch space, content updates, and some exchanges with friends and visitors on the Wretch Guestbook.

3.4.6 Qualitative data analysis

The IM conversation logs served as interview transcripts, and the two face-to-face interviews were transcribed by me. Coding was carried out using the qualitative data analysis software NVivo (See Appendix 10 for the coding frame). The first stage of coding was deductive, using thematic analysis (Flick, 2009) based on pre-defined concepts derived from the theoretical framework and on themes identified from the literature review and content analysis results. At this stage, most codes were tree nodes that grouped similar concepts/sub-themes under a parent node. The broad themes identified for the first coding were: impression management, meanings of self-portraiture, play, femininity, sexuality, social/interpersonal communication, audience, photographic subjects, the tool of self-portraiture, and the use of Wretch albums.

The second stage coding was inductive. Using the themes noted in the field notes as of potential interest, I immersed myself in the data in order to search for texts that would support my 'hunch' about a new theme, and also allowed themes to emerge naturally as I read through the texts. Most codes created at this stage were standalone free nodes and these included: makeup, confidence, privacy, storytelling, the when and why of self-portraiture, 'beautiful chick', 'bare look', style of self-portraiture, post-processing, and visitor counts.

By the end of these two stages, I had essentially created a 'mess' using the data collected. Some of the themes that I initially assumed would be important proved to be peripheral (e.g. audience comment, narcissism, gender bending, post-processing, photo-browsing, stranger contact), while themes I had assumed were peripheral became central (e.g. social communication), and some sub-themes turned out to be related to different parent themes (status update was related more to social communication than to personal

identity). Therefore, the third stage in the coding involved reorganising tree nodes to allow the child node to be paired with the most relevant parent node, merging nodes that captured similar ideas into one theme, and grouping together under a parent node all the nodes relevant to a broader common theme.

This restructuring work resulted in a clearer pattern in terms of what participants were enthusiastic about sharing, what themes were significant in their self-portraiture, and how the 'mess' could be understood and become more meaningful on the basis of a revision of theoretical interests and discovery of new themes via the fieldwork. Arguably, the nodes – especially the free nodes with many references – could have been further coded into more specific sub-themes, but it was felt that further grouping would not be conducive to the analysis and interpretation of data, since, as much as NVivo is useful for organising large amounts of data around meaningful themes, it does not help with data interpretation. I therefore continued the final analysis in hard copy examining nodes and accompanying segments of texts.

3.5   Legal and Ethical Considerations

Below I describe the legal and ethical issues that emerged in my fieldwork and how I managed these.

3.5.1 Pornographic self-portraits

Viewing online photographs of underage people has serious implications if one expects to find illegal or indecent images of minors. In the UK, it is necessary to apply for clearance in order to view illegal content as part of a research process. In the data collection phase of the quantitative content analysis, I did not expect to find illegal images of underage children on Wretch album, which is owned by Yahoo! Taiwan, on the basis of Wretch's terms of use, which state that users should not 'upload, post, email or otherwise transmit any content that is unlawful…vulgar, obscene…' (Yahoo! Taiwan, n.d., para 7). Also, Wretch claims that it adheres to the 'Taiwan Internet Content Rating Regulations'. These were sufficient reasons to believe that unlawful content or

pornographic self-portraits of the teenagers (child pornography[30] falls into this category) would not be allowed to be shared on Wretch. I did not encounter any pornographic self-portraits of minors.

3.5.2 Authorship and privacy protection

Studying online content such as teenagers' self-portraits that can be accessed by anyone using a computer raises questions about online privacy and authorship. Barnes (2004) points out that, while such online content is similar to TV programmes in that both are publicly available, the individuals creating the content may be sharing private, personal details because of the illusion of privacy provided by the smaller online audience. In order to respect these individuals' privacy, in the presentation of my results I do not include information that could connect an individual to the content she or he created (King, 1996). Content posted on publicly accessible areas of Wretch is considered to be the intellectual property of the individual concerned and as such must be respected. Therefore, in the content analysis (Chapter 4), I studied publicly viewable self-portraits, but do not describe them in ways that would reveal the identity or appearance of the relevant teenagers. The self-portraits used for illustration in my analysis were collected from young adults who responded to my message posted on the 'Wanted' board on the BBS site 'ptt.cc', which asked explicitly for self-portraits that could be used in my thesis research. All participants gave written informed consent. Among the participants in the qualitative phase of the research, similar care was taken to ensure that anything said in interviews, or any content shared on their Wretch Album – including account names and album titles – would not be presented in a way that would allow a reader to identify them through a web search.

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[30] In Taiwan, child pornography is defined as 'pictures, video tapes, films, discs, electronic signals or any other products about the sexual intercourse or obscene act of a person under the age of 18' (Child Welfare Bureau, Article 27).

3.5.3 Illegal or distressing information

It was possible that in the course of fieldwork illegal content, evidence of illegal activities and/or information indicating a participant's intention to harm him or herself or others could be revealed (Stern, 2003). I decided that, should I encounter illegal content or evidence of illegal activity (e.g. posting nude photos, soliciting behaviour) on an individual's public-accessible Wretch space, the content or behaviour would be reported to the site using the default 'report this picture' link that appears on every Wretch page. Should distressing information be revealed on a public Wretch space, or should illegal activities or harmful intent be disclosed in the course of the participant's private communication with me, I would express my concern and inform the participant that I would be consulting my supervisor about how to proceed. I made it clear in the consent form that my supervisor was familiar with the area and would be able to consult experts on child protection in the UK. On this basis, it would be decided whether to take action. The potential for this conditional breach of confidentiality was mentioned in the information sheet. I was not confronted with such situations in my fieldwork.

3.6   Methodological Reflections on Online Interviews

In the context of the interviews, a 'model' participant was one who concentrated throughout the interview and engaged actively by sharing information and asking questions when something was unclear, allowing co-construction and maintenance of a lively flow in a focused interview. Not all participants were model participants. Some appeared 'warm', chatty and committed to participation; others were more reserved, distracted or even uninterested. Dunn (2005) points out that interviewing and observing young participants in their natural settings has the drawback that the researcher has less control over the interaction and relationship. This is especially true for online interviewing of children using IM, where the lack of face-to-face interaction makes it difficult to encourage reserved, distracted or uninterested participants to engage more fully. This was one of the methodological challenges of the fieldwork.

3.6.1 Repeat interviews

Originally I planned to conduct three or four interviews with each participant, over a two-month period, in parallel with unobtrusive observation of their Wretch Album. I wanted to gather rich data on their engagement with Wretch Albums and examine the role of self-portraiture in their identity work. I had hoped that in successive interviews we could discuss Wretch updates and particular themes in order to provide a wealth of data on their self-portraiture practice, their use of Wretch for networking, and their thoughts about some of the important topics that this research explores. However, after the first few interviews I realised that this would not be possible. Participation in a research project demands time and effort on the part of participants. Prolonged voluntary participation demands more than one-off curiosity about the research and an enthusiasm for sharing one's experiences and thoughts with a stranger researcher. It requires commitment to participate and a willingness to develop a relationship with the researcher. Participation was not a sufficient incentive to maintain the interest of my interviewees; I had follow-up interviews with only 21 participants. There was another compounding factor here. Since the interviews took place in participants' leisure time, when they might have been engaging in other activities or preferring another activity to talking to an adult researcher, obtaining participants' agreement to take part in additional interviews or even to show up online for a scheduled interview was difficult. This was more because of other commitments than any lack of willingness to participate in the research. While follow-up interviews would have generated deeper and richer understanding of each individual's self-portraiture practice, they proved difficult in practice.

3.6.2 Issues related to IM interviews

While the method of IM interviewing allowed me to reach participants in their naturalistic settings and to elicit lively responses, it has several methodological shortcomings that inevitably affected the quality of some interviews. First, using IM for interviews is akin to mixing business with pleasure. While the intent was to get them to talk and listen in an uninhibited way, some participants translated this as constituting a

'chat' and not something that required serious attention. Since the interviews took place in participants' leisure time, on the internet, through a medium that they used to interact with friends, several online and offline distractions were able to intrude. The interview was competing for participants' attention with other people/activities. It was not unusual for participants to quit the interview or stop responding because they were watching TV, talking to friends online or taking a phone call, or being called by parents to do something. While this is sometimes inevitable, some participants dropped a quick message to explain when they would next be online to continue the interview, while others hastily ended the conversation or disappeared without a word. The latter tended to happen repeatedly among those participants who did not take the interviews seriously, making it difficult to cover all the topics in depth.

In conducting interviews, it is important to leave sufficient time for participants to reflect and respond (Mason, 2002), and to rephrase questions if they appear not to understand. In face-to-face contexts, paralinguistic cues help the interviewer to determine whether the pace of the interview is right and whether the participant understands the questions. In IM interviews there are no such cues to help the interviewer to interpret silence. Sometimes I thought participants had finished speaking, but when I moved on to the next question the participant would type in what was clearly a response to the previous question. In such situations, I would respond to the follow-up answer to the first question, encouraging her to finish her thought before moving on to the next question. However, there may have been occasions when the participant was thinking about how to respond, but gave up when confronted with a new question. The balance between waiting for a response in the absence of physical cues, but not waiting so long as to lose the momentum of the conversation or the participant's attention, is an especial problem in IM interviews.

There is also another kind of silence that is harder for the researcher to manage. A participant's silence in response to a question may indicate that she did not understand the question, or that she was not interested in answering the question. Trying to rephrase it or move to another question may be translated by the participant as overly zealous,

and reduce her interest even more. For instance, in my pilot study interview with Smiley, an 18-year-old girl, a long pause preceded all of her responses, which were succinct, bare statements such as 'not bad', 'didn't pay attention', 'maybe', 'alright' and 'don't know'. If I tried to probe further, or ask another question during one of these silences she just ignored the question. Without physical cues, I could not judge whether she was distracted, unable to respond for some reason, or bored by the questions. This interview ended prematurely after I asked 'have you ever received messages from strangers on your Wretch Guestbook saying they wanted to befriend you?' After three minutes of silence, I ventured a different question 'Do you think there's any risk in putting personal photos online?' After another three-minute silence, I asked 'are these questions too difficult to answer?' in response to which Smiley's status changed to offline, and the interview ended.

While IM interviewing allowed participants not to be completely taken up by the interview, with the more distracted or uninterested participants the interviews were poor quality, and it is impossible to know whether face-to-face interviews in more structured settings, such as school, would have been more useful. The participant must be genuinely interested in the research subject to engage fully. If the interview questions are not interesting, even face-to-face interviews may lack depth. The participant's level of engagement is determined by their will to participate. There are limits to the researcher's ability to pique the participant's interest if she is not attracted to the interviews. IM interviews 'test' the participant's willingness to take part, and demand more effort to 'block the time' in a context with many other distractions. This is not to say that all IM interviews were of poor quality – when a participant really does make herself available for the interview and engages actively, then a focused, dynamic and in-depth conversation about thoughts and experiences is possible.

3.7   Conclusion

This chapter has laid out the research design and discussed the rationale. It described the data collection procedure and legal and ethical concerns. The research

addressed the research questions using a two-phase methodology employing quantitative and qualitative methods. The first phase was an exploratory study that used content analysis to examine teenagers' self-portraits in order to identify prominent styles of representation that are related to gender. The analysis helped to construct an overall picture of Taiwanese teenagers' self-portraiture. The second phase involved semi-structured interviews, conducted over IM, with young females aged 13-20, and non-participant observation of participants' Wretch spaces. The purpose of the interviews was to elicit girls' accounts of what self-portraiture means to them and the process of their production. Observations were a complementary method to support girls' verbal explanations of uses and experiences, and fill in any gaps in information supplied by the girls about their uses and maintenance of Wretch Album. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS and cross-tabulation, chi-square tests of independence, and cluster analysis. Qualitative data were analysed via NVivo primarily through thematic analysis. These data acted as reference points that enabled comparison across groups (boys and girls), and provided complementary knowledge about girls' verbal descriptions of use and practice.

While generalisation was not possible with the content analysis due to the small sample size for gender differences, it revealed broad patterns of gendered self-representation and is the first systematic study of self-portraits and portraiture on this scale in Taiwan. The qualitative interviews and observation were not without problems related to recruitment and to the interview medium, but I was able to learn a lot about self-portraiture and girls' identity work from a group of engaged, generous participants who provided more understanding about the role of digital media in the lives of people in this age-group, and whose voices are not always heard by adults. Chapter 4 is the first empirical chapter in this thesis and allows the forest – the landscape of teenagers' self-portraits – to be identified before examination of the trees – individual girls' practices of self-portraiture – which are described in Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

Chapter 4 A Content Analysis of Teenagers' Self-Portraits

4.1   Introduction

A cursory look at girls' self-portraits posted on Wretch Album frontpage reveals a distinctive gendered pattern of many self-representations and a homogenous representational style, notably big eyes, innocent and/or suggestive looks. Such gendered patterns of communication – which emphasise the qualities conventionally associated with femininity and masculinity, are found in other studies of gender and CMC (White, 2001; Thomas, 2007; Elm 2009; Siibak, 2006; Kapidzic & Herring, 2011). The prevalence of gendered styles of communication and representation attest to the argument that people cannot simply leave markers of identities, such as race and gender, when they go online, because the online is not a 'world apart', and experiences, practices and relations flow between the online and offline, and extend from one to the other (Leander & McKim, 2003). However, it questions the equally valid, but opposite argument – that CMC opens up opportunities for non-traditional ways of identity play and gender performance (Turkle, 1996; White, 2003; Kelly, Pomerantz, & Currie, 2006), such as exploration of possibilities and defining oneself outside the conventional gender dichotomy (Hans, Selvidge, Tinker, & Webb, 2011). This chapter is an exploratory study of the state of Taiwanese' teenagers' self-portraits posted on Wretch Album. It uses empirical evidence to address the research questions of how teenagers represent themselves through self-portraits online, and whether teenage girls and boys portray themselves in gender-specific ways.

Although the research initially was aimed at analysing only girls' self-portraits, it became clear that a point of reference was needed to identify whether gendered representational styles were unique to girls' self-portraits, or indeed were common also to boys. The purpose of this study is not to argue that the presence of gendered representational styles in self-portraits results from young people's consumption of mainstream media content – in which stereotypical gender representations abound. The effects of the media are complex (as shown in Section 1.4), and it is not possible to establish any causal relation between consumption and production of images simply

through a content analysis of self-portraits. It also may not be a constructive enquiry since media images are rarely consumed 'off the shelf' and their consumption and production involves some blending in individual interpretations and/or appropriations. This study seeks to add to knowledge about how gender identities are performed in self-representation through CMC, in the Taiwanese youth context. The specific questions for this study are operationalised and formulated as follows:

1. Do gendered representation styles persist in teenagers' self-portraits?
2. Do teenagers represent themselves in ways that are not conventionally gendered?

In order to identity gendered representational styles in the self-portraits analysed, and to understand what about identities those styles might be used to convey, we need an analytical framework that allows a decoding of gendered patterns in images. Visual media, especially advertisements, frequently resort to the use of gendered representational styles in order quickly to 'get the message across' to audiences. Scholarly analysis of the visual portrayal of gender in media abounds in both the English-language and Taiwanese literatures. Some examine gender roles and activities, while others study what details, such as body language, reveal about gender relations. This thesis research is interested in decoding the gendered body language employed in self-portraits. Section 4.2 draws on relevant research on images that examines these aspects of representations, explicitly to show how the coding variables and categories for this study were derived and are developed (see Section 4.4.1). A better understanding of the familiar gendered codes of representations in the visual media, and the latent social meanings carried through these codes should offer insight into how teenagers might wish to be seen through their self-portraiture work.

4.2   Decoding Conventional Gender Representations

Gender representations in the media are often based on established gender stereotypes that assume various traits and behaviours among men and women (Kite, Deaux & Haines, 2008). Based on a number of studies (Algoe, 2000; Bem, 1995; Carpenter & Trentman, 1998; Kite et al., 2008; Plant, Hyde, Keltner, & Devine, 2000),

the broad concept of gender stereotypes can be dissected into several subtypes: roles (including occupational and family roles); ideologies (e.g. Chauvinism); physical attributes (e.g. beautiful, strong); behaviours (graceful, boorish); relations (e.g. dominant, submissive); mode of dress (e.g. skirt, trousers); sexual attributes (e.g. sexy, macho) and emotions (e.g. expressive, assertive).

In the 1980s, a large body of quantitative research, using content analysis, investigated the portrayal of gender roles in media content such as television series and advertisements. Gill's (2007a) summary of studies of advertisements in the US and UK shows that women more often are depicted as attractive, in domestic roles and promoting household or personal products, while men are portrayed as authoritative, functioning in a wider variety of occupational roles and promoting higher-priced products (see Dominick & Rauch, 1972). The same tendency can be seen in Taiwanese advertisements, which mostly assign to women decorative or objectified roles (Chang, 1994; Wu & Chen, 2007), also mostly represent female characters either as the 'innocent girl'– sweet, non-threatening, incapable of self-defence, pure, weak, shy and tender, or as the 'sexy beauty' who is confident, mature and sexually attractive (Gu, 1995). The analysis by Leiss, Klein and Jhally (1997) of cultural values in advertisements finds that advertisements aimed at women tend to use more codes related to beauty, family and romance, while those aimed at men tend to use ruggedness and fraternity.

Erving Goffman (1979), in his work *Gender Advertisements*, studied how advertisers use cultural ideas of genders in social interaction to construct commercial realism. He focused on more subtle cues, such as facial expressions, body postures and hand movements, in the visual compositions of advertisements and refers to the contrived postures and props in advertisements as the 'institutionalized arrangements in social life' (Goffman, 1979, p. 23), which function as shortcuts to evoke realism for the viewers and reflect the advertisers' positions on 'how women can be profitably pictured' (p. 25). Goffman's purposeful sampling of advertisements that show the interactions between men and women reveals the subtle, 'hyper-ritualized' behaviours, which, to the audience, present 'an ideal conception of the two sexes and their structural relationship to each other' (p. 84). He categorises displays of gender acts into six groups: (1) relative

size: in most cases, women are portrayed as shorter, smaller and of lower status; (2) the feminine touch: women are more often shown caressing the surface of objects, cradling objects or touching themselves, men are shown manipulating objects; (3) function ranking: men tend to be depicted in superior roles and, when co-present with women, are portrayed as more functional; (4) the ritualisation of subordination: women tend to be shown smiling, lying down, or in deferential body postures such as body canting or childish poses; (5) licensed withdrawal: women are portrayed as psychologically 'floating' out of the scene or covering their faces; and (6) the family: women are depicted as mothers or caretakers, and mostly seen together with daughters. Although Goffman's analysis has been criticised for being based on a purposely-selected sample and, hence, offering a poor representation of gender portrayal in the media, his work did highlight the 'stylization' and 'hyper-ritualization' of gender displays in advertisements, and his analysis has been replicated by several authors (e.g. Belknap & Leonard II, 1991; Kang, 1997).

In addition to conventional patterns of gender representations, the particular trait of girlishness plays a distinctive role in Asian societies' ideals related to femininity. This is revealed in Maynard and Taylor's (1999) comparative study on the variability of 'girlishness' in advertisements in versions of *Seventeen* magazines in Japan and the US. Maynard and Taylor define 'girlish' as: 'a socially constructed, often playful childlike pose, spoken or acted out, that explicitly displays the vulnerability of approval seeking' (p. 40), and found that advertisements in the US version sent mixed message to girls – who sometimes were portrayed as girlish, but most of the time not; advertisements in the Japanese versions contained frequent and consistent portrayals of girlish images – representing girls as delicate, non-aggressive, cute, playful and childlike. The study by Frith, Shaw and Cheng (2005) also confirms that US women's magazine advertisements contain more sexual portrayal of women while women's magazine advertisements from Singapore and Taiwan depict women as more demure. In particular, Taiwanese advertisements have a higher percentage of the 'cute/girl next door' portrayal (p. 66), an image that conforms to Taiwanese conventional ideals of female beauty – fair (white) skin, smooth long hair, slender body, fashionable outfit, natural-looking make-up –a trend highlighted in Sun and Shaw's (2003) study.

We next look at how genders are represented in self-produced photographs of young people. Several studies of photographs posted online find consistent gender-specific ways of representation that conform to conventional gender stereotypes. Siibak's (2007) content analysis of photographs posted by users aged between 13 and 30 on the Estonian site, Rate, shows that most girls present themselves as 'slim and toned with long blond hair and a seductive smile' (p. 11) and most boys prefer to pose as the new, hip, metrosexual or the macho man, because gender-stereotypes are the 'safe and sound ways for appealing to potential partners' (ibid.). Elm's (2009) analysis of Swedish young people aged 15–19, who post photographs on the Swedish site Lunarstorm, shows that young women are more likely to post photographs depicting faces, while men are more likely to post photographs of their torsos. She suggests that this may reflect young people's attempts to demonstrate ideals of femininity (beautiful face and passive sexuality) and masculinity (physical strength). In Siibak's (2009) survey of Estonian youth aged 12–17 on their attitudes to profile photographs posted on SNS, she found that 'looking good' was the most important factor when considering posting profile photographs. Significantly more girls than boys reported this factor, because girls saw their ideal self as aligned with the stereotypical gender image emphasizing the soft feminine value. Kapidzic and Herring (2011) provide similar findings in their analysis of teenage profile pictures posted on chatroom sites, which shows that in their profile photographs, there were statistically significant differences in the ways girls tended to present themselves – in seductive or submissive behavioural postures, and dressed in demure or suggestive ways.

This review of the literature on gender stereotypes in media representations provides a tool to build analytical categories and image codes. Some studies of online self-representations show that gendered representations have a deeper purpose than to 'profitably picture' men and women's relations (Goffman, 1979) and that they continue to play an important role in young people's self-representations. This is somewhat intriguing set against the facilities offered by CMC to provide more liberating, and perhaps 'alternative' gender embodiments (Hans, Selvidge, Tinker, & Webb, 2011). As Stewart (2003) argues, perhaps the role that gender stereotypes play in the formation of

gender identity serves as something one draws upon to 'either reinforce them or resist their application' (p. 779). Below we analyse whether Taiwanese teenagers do or do not employ gendered representational styles in order to define themselves, or compare themselves to.

4.3   Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are based on the impressions gained from viewing self-portraits and the studies of self-representation reviewed above. The variables *mouth area expression*, *facial expression*, *hand/finger gesture*, *body posture*, and *mode of dress* are manifest and relevant cues to gender behaviours. The variables and coding values used in the analysis are constructed based on the literature on gender portrayals in magazines and advertisements, and are described in Section 4.4.1.

H1: In terms of mouth area expression, girls' self-portraits will exhibit a range of expressions while boys' self-portraits will exhibit less expressive moves.

H2: In terms of facial expression, girls' self-portraits will tend towards being cute/vulnerable or sexy/sensual, while boys' self-portraits will tend to display more 'cool'/fierce expressions.

H3: Girls' self-portraits show their hands as gentle self-touching and soft-touching, whereas boys' self-portraits either do not concentrate on an action or show their hands engaged in utilitarian touch.

H4: Girls' body postures in self-portraits will demonstrate more deference or be suggestive whereas boys' self-portraits are either neutral or are posed to show dominance and strength.

H5: The way girls are dressed and the parts of their bodies that are revealed in self-portraits suggest sexual attractiveness compared to boys' self-portraits.

4.4　Method

Table 3 presents the four cases on which this analysis is based; each examines the self-portraits using different statistical methods in order to address different aspects of the research questions.

Table 3 Outline of mini-studies

Study	1	2	3	4
Section	4.5.1	4.5.2	4.5.3	4.5.4
Focus of study	Teenagers' self-portraits posted in their own albums	Teenagers' profile pictures (self-portrait)	Typology of self-portraits	Degree of variation in self-portraits
Sample size	2,000	169	2,000	2,000
Sample composition	10 self-portraits of 100 girls and 100 boys	Profile picture of 100 girls and 100 boys (169 of them use self-portrait as their profile picture)	10 self-portraits of 100 girls and 100 boys respectively	10 self-portraits of 100 girls and 100 boys respectively
Statistical method	Cross-tabulations	Pearson's chi-squared test; Fisher's exact test	Cluster analysis	Cross-tabulations
Purpose	Identify overall patterns related to gendered style of representations	Hypotheses-testing. Identify pattern and compare with inferential statistics with study 1	Identify commonalities in teenagers' self-representations	Do individuals experiment with different 'faces' as identity play

Data were collected from the Wretch Album (www.wretch.cc/album) portal in December 2008. The sampling rationale is outlined in Section 3.4; below I explain its implementation. The study adopted a three-stage sampling technique (see Figure 1 for procedures in Stage 1 and Stage 2).

The first stage identified the target population based on the search criteria – boys and girls aged 12-18, who post at least 10 self-portraits in their featured Wretch albums. The second stage randomly selected from this target population 100 boys, 100 girls, and

10 self-portraits of each. The decision to sample 10 self-portraits of each individual is a trade-off between sampling difficulty and study scale. Given the complex and labour-intensive task of identifying the target population, 200 individuals appears to be a reasonable and manageable number. Also, in order to ensure a large enough sample size for patterns across genders and within individuals to be identified, 10 self-portraits of each individual seems appropriate. However, each individual self-portrait (as a unit of analysis) is not mutually independent, which precludes the possibility of inferential statistics such as correlation. To compensate, we included a third stage – collecting profile pictures of the 200 sampled individuals and analysing the correlation between gender and representational styles. The results of this part of the analysis should facilitate the interpretation of the descriptive statistics.

Figure 3 Sampling procedure

Stage 1

Wretch

↓

Girls / Boys

↓

Hot / Random

↓

Album cover is self-portrait

↓

Album contains at least 10 self-portraits

↓

Age 12–18

↓

Qualifies as target population

Stage 2

Girls (Hot) / Girls (Random) / Boys (Hot) / Boys (Random)

↓

Randomly select 50 individuals from each group

↓

Randomly select 10 self-portraits for each individual

↓

2000 self-portraits from 200 individuals

Every day on the Wretch Album front page, under the category 'girls' personal photographs', the site selects 500 girls' public albums featuring them as 'hot' albums, and another set of 500 public albums 'randomly' selected as 'random pick' albums.[31] Starting with these 500 hot and 500 random albums, I clicked on an album whose cover image was a self-portrait, to enter the album. First, I checked whether it contained more than ten self-portraits and, if so, checked for explicit written or visual cues to the album owner's age (e.g., "I'm really only 15 years old") or implicit clues (e.g., wearing high school uniform). If I identified the album owner's age as being between 12-18 - the criterion for my sample - I looked in the owner's Wretch space for other implicit clues to confirm her age status. Albums that passed both 'tests' were included in the target population. This search continued over five days and resulted in a list of featured albums owned by individual girls aged 12-18 who post more than 10 self-portraits in the featured album, and which constitutes my target population. I repeated the procedure for boys.

In the second stage, I used a random number generator to randomly select from each group (girls random, girls hot, boys random, boys hot) 50 featured albums, one for each of 50 individuals. I randomly selected from each featured album 10 self-portraits,[32] yielding a sample total of 2,000 self-portraits, 1,000 from 100 girls and a 1,000 from 100 boys. Since it was impossible to identify the complete population of self-portrait albums created by young people on Wretch, the percentage of self portrait albums represented by these 10 self-portraits is unknown. In addition, it is likely that Wretch imposes some selection on the albums and their contents. Therefore, our findings cannot be generalised to the whole population of Taiwanese teenagers' self-portraits posted on Wretch.

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[31] The criterion used by Wretch to categorise albums as 'hot' or 'random pick' is proprietary. When I asked about this, there was an implication that the more frequently an individual updated her Wretch Album, the more likely one of her albums would feature in the daily 500 list. In other words, while the 'hot' albums may be identified on the basis of high visitor counts, the 'random pick' albums may not be entirely randomly selected.

[32] E.g., if an album contained 54 photographs, I used a random number generator to select 10 numbers between 1-54 to identify which photographs should be used in the analysis. Where the photograph corresponding to the random number was not a self-portrait, I selected the first next self-portrait.

Over 10,000 albums were examined to find individual teenagers who met the target age group criterion. Below I list the characteristics of the final sample, which is composed of the teenagers producing the self-portraits that are analysed:

Table 4 Characteristics of the final sample

Age	12-15 years: 26 girl, 9 boys	n= 35
	16-18 years: 74 girls, 91 boys	n= 165
Gender	100 girls, 100 boys	N= 200
Album category	'Hot': 50 girls, 50 boys	n= 100
	'Random pick': 50 girls, 50 boys	n= 100

4.4.1 Coding Instrument

The coding instrument developed accounts for prominent gendered representational styles in self-portraits according to six variables: mouth area expression, facial expression, hand positions/actions, body posture, mode of dress, and revealed parts of the body[33]. The values for each variable are mutually exclusive. All variables and their values were developed based on Goffman's (1979) analysis, scholarly content analyses of gender portrayals, and inductive observation of the self-portraits posted on Wretch that are not part of the sample.

Mouth area expression: Mouth area actions are not considered in previous studies of gender portrayal, but are considered important in the study of self-portraits. The focus in many self-portraits is on the face. The mouth and lips can express the overall look and feeling being conveyed. This variable is designed to complement the *facial expression* variable. The mouth area variable checks for whether girls demonstrate a higher number of mouth expressions as part of their poses, such as pouting/puckered lips to express innocence or allure, an expression described as 'duck face' in English, and 'duck mouth' in Japan (ahiru-guchi) and Taiwan (yāzuǐ), and has been widely observed in (mostly

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[33] See 'Appendix 1: Content analysis coding protocol' for operational definitions of the values.

girls') self-portraits in many parts of the world, such as Taiwan, Japan (Marx, 2010)[34], U.S. (Miller, 2011) and Estonia (Siibak & Hernwall, 2011) or tight, pressed lips. Another mouth area pose commonly adopted used to create a 'girl-next-door' look or a 'classic beauty' look of friendly demeanour is the reserved smile or bright smile (Frith, Cheng & Shaw, 2004; Maynard & Taylor, 1999). The value *sensuous expression* corresponds to the *sexy/sensual* value for *facial expression*, and includes the tongue licking the lips, biting the lip, or showing a finger placed on the lip. The values more often associated with masculinity are *downturned lips* (suggesting displeasure), and *blank expression*, both based on the constructed belief that men are less likely to show their emotions, and if they do, the emotions displayed are likely to be negative such as anger or aggression (Kite, Deaux, & Haines, 2008). Finally, the value *controlled smile* is considered gender-neutral and includes demure smiles – expressing friendliness and modesty, and a smirk – expressing smugness.

Facial expressions: This variable examines whether girls were more likely to portray themselves as cute, girlish, childlike or vulnerable, conventionally associated with femininity (*cute/vulnerable*). Following Maynard and Taylor's (1999) conceptualisation of girlishness, 'childlike behaviour, and nonthreatening demeanour' are used in this study as visual indicators of a cute/vulnerable expression. It includes pouting lips and wide-open, rounded eyes, which can be translated as childlike, or delicate and vulnerable. The corresponding value for boys, *cool/expressionless*, examines whether boys were more likely to portray themselves looking expressionless or even standoffish, looks conventionally associated with masculinity. The value *funny/dramatic* was added to capture a common expression of making playful, funny, dramatic or mischievous faces. This is a gender-neutral category, although at times could be employed to invoke childish innocence and vulnerability. The value *sexy/sensual* indicates whether girls are more likely to adopt a sexy or sensual look to emphasise their physical attractiveness, as frequently observed in girls' self-portraits

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[34]The 'duck mouth' look became so popular in Japan that the model Matsu You even published a book titled 'Popularity explodes on Twitter! Everyone's favorite duck mouth' that shows how to make a duck mouth. (See book cover on http://www.amazon.co.jp/exec/obidos/ASIN/4838720823/nsw-22/ref=nosim/.)

posted on Wretch. The variable *others* refers to facial expressions that are not considered gender stereotypical, since the purpose and possibility of coding is not to identify and code *all* facial expressions, but to code only those pertinent to the research questions.

Hand positions/actions: This variable examines whether self-touching and soft-touching, which suggest delicacy and childlike vulnerability (Goffman, 1979), and sexual self-touching, which suggests sexual availability, is more salient to girls' self-portraits compared to boys' self-portraits, where the hands are used in practical poses such as the utilitarian touch that suggests functionality.

Body pose: This variable examines whether poses that suggest deference, such as body canting, space-reducing poses, and lying down, or poses that suggest sexual availability, such as sexual body language, or poses that suggest intimacy and emotionality, such as holding/snuggling an object or a person, are more common in girls' self-portraits compared to boys' self-portraits where the poses adopted, such as muscle-flexing and space-occupying poses, more often suggest dominance. These values are adapted from Goffman (1979), Browne (1998), Baker (2005), Belknap and Leonard II (1991).

Mode of dress & Revealed body areas: These two variables explore whether girls are more likely than boys to represent themselves as sexy by wearing suggestive skimpy outfits and revealing more 'skin'. The values for *mode of dress* are adapted from the measures in Soley and Kurzbard (1986), plus *everyday* and *indiscernible*. The values for *revealed body areas* seek to capture the amount of the body (skin) that is revealed, and are based on my observation of self-portraits and partially adapted from Krassas, Blauwkamp, and Wesselink's (2001) measure of nudity levels in magazines. The values *undressed* for the *mode of dress* variable, and *full nudity* for the *revealed body* areas are not included in the coding because the study was not expecting to find nude self-portraits of teenagers on Wretch –which would constitute a child pornography offence.

The researcher, as primary coder, coded all the photos. A second coder, of the opposite sex (a male Taiwanese postgraduate student) with a similar cultural framework of interpretation, was hired to code 10% of the total sample (200 photos) to ensure that the coding was conducted with minimum level of subjective interpretation and reflected common cultural interpretations. The second coder was trained using self-portraits collected on Wretch outside the actual sample. Coding disagreements were discussed and the coding protocol revised when necessary, to reduce ambiguity. Once inter-coder reliability, calculated using Krippendorf's (2004) Alpha via SPSS, was above 0.80 for all the variables in the pilot coding, the second coder proceeded to code 10% of the self-portraits from the total sample. Coding training, pilot coding and formal coding were conducted and completed in March to May 2009 (3 months). Inter-coder reliability for the final coding was above 0.80 for all the variables.[35]

4.5   Findings

This section presents the findings from the four 'mini' studies. Section 4.5.1 discusses teenagers' representational styles in terms of how patterns and frequencies relate to genders, based on the 2,000 self-portraits of the 200 individuals. Section 4.5.2 focuses on teenagers' profile self-portraits, applying chi-square analysis to test whether the hypothesized gender differences in representational styles are statistically significant. Section 4.5.3 treats the 2,000 self-portraits as representing Taiwanese teenagers' self-portrayals, and uses cluster analysis to identify the types of self-portraits teenagers create and the characteristics of each type. Section 4.5.4 focuses on the individual teenager and uses the results of cluster analysis to scrutinize whether and to what extent teenagers engage in identity experimentation or play by representing themselves as different types.

4.5.1 Teenagers' self-portraits posted in albums

This section presents the results from the content analysis of the 2,000 self-portraits based on the sample of 100 girls and 100 boys (10 self-portraits from each

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[35] The alpha value is 0. 93 for mouth area movement, 0.94 for facial expression, 0.97 for hand movement, 0.94 for body posture, 0.91 for mode of dress, and 0. 96 for revealed body parts.

individual). The 2000 self-portraits are the sampling unit in this section. As already noted, since the sampling units are not mutually independent, inferential statistics are not possible. The results below are descriptive statistics:

4.5.1.1   Mouth area movements:

As Table 5 shows, a controlled smile such as a smirk or a faint smile is the most common mouth area expression, and was observed in 25% of the 2,000 self-portraits. Lips puckered/pouting (22%) and no particular expression (20.9%) were, respectively, the second and third most common expressions. Other mouth area expressions include 'unsmiling parted lips' (7.1%), pressed lips (6.5%) and a bright smile (5.7%). Very few – less than 2% –of the photos showed subjects with mouths wide open (1.6%), or with downturned lips (1%). Photos depicting 'sensuous' expressions were also infrequent (0.8%).

In relation to gender and age differences, one in three among the girls' self-portraits portrayed them with puckered/pouting mouths, frequently associated with girlishness or childlike behaviour, whereas only one in nine self-portraits of boys depicted similar expressions (girls 32.9% of photos, boys 11.1% of photos).[36] Similarly, 8% of girls' self-portraits showed the subject giving a bright smile, whereas only 3.4% of boys' self-portraits did so. While more younger girls' self-portraits showed them with puckered/pouting lips than did portraits of older girls (younger girls 36.5%, older girls 31.6%), more self-portraits of older girls depicted subjects with controlled or bright smiles (younger girls 21.2%, older girls 33.4%; younger girls 4.2%, older girls 9.3%). This might suggest that as girls grow older, they gradually shift away from the playful, childlike puckering/pouting to the more 'grown up' smiles that convey friendliness or modesty. On the other hand, one in three of boys' self-portraits (34.3%) portrayed the subjects with no particular mouth expression, compared with just 7.5% of girls, indicating that boys may be less expressive in self-portraits than girls. The most frequent

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[36]The unit of analysis in this section (4.5.1) is each self-portrait, not each individual. The percentage given in brackets, like the percentage figures in the main text, refers to the self-portraits, not the individuals. In other words, 'girls' photos 32.9%' here refers to 32.9% of self-portraits taken by girls, rather than 32.9% of the girls. The same logic applies for all percentages in brackets in this section.

mouth expression in boys' self-portraits was the controlled smile (1 in 5 boys' self-portraits), compared to 1 in 3 of girls' self-portraits (girls 30.2%, boys 19.8%). There were more examples of photos of boys exhibiting expressions associated with masculinity, such as parted lips but no smile – and 'blank' looks (girls 5%, boys 9.2%), or grimaces – which could be interpreted as expressing disapproval (girls 0.3%, boys 1.7%). The rare occurrence of sensuous expressions only occurred in self-portraits of girls from both age groups but in self-portraits of older boys. This might suggest that girls learn from early adolescence that appearing sensuous/sexual can enhance one's physical attractiveness, while boys learn this only as they approach late adolescence.

Table 5 Mouth area movements (percentages)

	Girls			Boys			12-15	16-18	All	N=
	All	12-15	16-18	All	12-15	16-18				
Puckered/Pouting	32.9	36.5	31.6	11.1	15.6	10.7	31.1	20.1	22	440
Sensuous moves	1.0	1.2	0.9	0.7	0	0.8	0.9	0.8	0.8	17
Parted lips, unsmiling	5.0	7.7	4.1	9.2	7.8	9.3	7.7	7	7.1	142
Controlled smile	30.2	21.2	33.4	16.7	20.1	19.8	20	26.1	25.0	500
Bright smile	8.0	4.2	9.3	3.4	2.2	3.5	3.7	6.1	5.7	114
Pressed lips	6.5	11.9	4.6	6.5	13.3	5.8	12.3	5.3	6.5	130
Downturned lips	0.3	0	0.4	1.7	4.4	1.4	1.1	1.0	1.0	20
Wide open mouth	0.9	0.8	0.9	2.2	0	2.4	0.6	1.8	1.6	31
Other	0.3	0.4	0.3	1.2	1.1	1.2	0.6	0.8	0.8	15
Expressionless	7.5	7.3	7.6	34.3	34.4	34.3	14.3	22.3	20.9	418
Not applicable (not in frame)	7.4	8.8	6.9	9.9	4.4	10.4	7.7	8.8	8.6	173
N=	1000	260	740	1000	90	910	350	1650	2000	2000

4.5.1.2   Facial expression:

As Table 6 shows, among all the sample self-portraits, cute/vulnerable was the most popular facial expression (30.6%), with cool/fierce being the next most popular (26.8%). There are clear gender differences: similar to the results for mouth expressions associated with girlishness, in 1 in 2 of girls' self-portraits (52.5%) the subjects had the cute/vulnerable expression commonly associated with femininity compared to only 1 in 12 of boys' self-portraits (8.6%). For cool/fierce expression commonly associated with masculinity, the proportions were 1 in 2 boys' self-portraits (49.3%) compared to only 4.4% of girls' self-portraits. For the gender-neutral funny/dramatic facial expression, gender differences are less striking (girls 8.1%, boys 10.9%). Interestingly, there were more younger girls' and boys' self-portraits adopting these expressions compared to the portraits of their older counterparts, suggesting that maturity is accompanied by a shift from the playful funny/dramatic looks towards more 'grown-up' serious looks, a trend also observed in mouth expressions. For sexy/sensual facial expressions, it applies to only nine self-portraits of girls and one self-portrait of a boy (girls 0.9%, boys 0.1%).

We need to study the relation between mouth expressions and facial expression since the former is elemental in the overall expression - whether cute, cool, funny, or sexy, etc. We next look at the results from a cross-tabulation of the variables *mouth area expression* and *facial expression* (see Table 7).

Table 6 Facial expression (percentages)

	Girls			Boys			12-15	16-18	All	N=
	All	12-15	16-18	All	12-15	16-18				
Cute/vulnerable	52.5	50	53.4	8.6	8.9	8.6	39.4	28.7	30.6	611
Cool/fierce	4.4	5.4	4.1	49.3	52.2	49	17.4	28.8	26.8	537
Funny/dramatic	8.1	13.8	6.1	10.9	15.6	10.4	14.3	8.5	9.5	190
Sexy/sensual	0.9	0.8	0.9	0.1	0	0.1	0.6	0.5	0.5	10
Others	27.4	21.5	29.5	23.0	18.9	23.4	20.9	26.1	25.2	504
Not applicable (not in frame or blurry)	6.7	8.5	6.1	8.1	4.4	8.5	7.4	7.4	7.4	148
N=	1000	260	740	1000	90	910	350	1650	2000	2000

Table 7 Common mouth expressions by facial expressions (percentages)

Cute/ vulnerable	Cool/ fierce	Funny/ dramatic	Sexy/ Sensual	Others	Total
Puckered/ Pouted 49.2%	No lips moves 62.4%	Puckered/ Pouting 57.4%	Sensuous moves 50%	Controlled smile 51.4%	Controlled smile 27.4%
Controlled smile 23.4%	Controlled smile 14.3%	Controlled smile 14.4%	Puckered/ Pouting 25% Parted lips with no smile 25%	Bright smile 18.7%	Puckered/ Pouted 24.1%
n=598	n=526	n=188	n=8	n=498	N=1818

Table 7 (N=1818) shows the results based on valid cases (i.e. excluding the 'non-applicable' cases in both variables). It shows a 'cute/vulnerable' look is generally achieved by puckering/pouting the lips (49.2%) or a controlled smile (23.4%). Another 8.5% of self-portraits categorised as cute/vulnerable faces showed the subject with pressed lips, and another 8.5% had no particular discernible mouth expression, showing that the visual effect of cute/vulnerable can be achieved by the eyes, for example, very wide opened eyes and slightly raised eyebrows to give an innocent and vulnerable appearance. The self-portraits displaying 'cool/fierce' looks generally achieved this by an expressionless mouth (62.4%) or 'blank' look; less common (14.3%) was the controlled smile or an expression of 'couldn't care less' and smirking. In a few portraits (8.4%), the subjects' lips were parted not but smiling or smirking. For the 'funny or dramatic' look, slightly over half (57.4%) showed the subjects with puckered/pouting lips, a few (14.4%) displayed controlled smiles, and 11.7% of subjects had their mouths wide open to give a dramatic effect. Among the eight self-portraits with 'sexy/sensual' expressions, four showed the subjects performing sensuous actions with the lips or kissing another person, two showed subjects with puckered/pouting lips, and two showed subjects with parted lips but no smile. Although we cannot precisely describe all the facial expressions employed by teenagers among those coded as 'other' (i.e. not gender-stereotypical), around 70% showed the subjects smiling; 51.4% smiling reservedly and 18.7% had bright smiles on their faces. This indicates that smiling and creating an impression of being friendly is a popular way for teenagers to represent themselves on Wretch.

4.5.1.3   Hand positions/actions:

Employing the hands in gestures or poses would appear to be uncommon in self-portraits, with only 1 in 4 self-portraits (23.8%) showing hands engaged in some kind of action (see Table 8). Where hands are part of the self-portraits (n=477), more than half show the subjects self-touching (49.3 % touching the face, 8.6% touching the lips, and 1% sexual self-touching). In terms of gender differences within all self-portraits (N=2,000), twice as many girls' self-portraits portrayed the subject's hand (31.2% girls, 16.5% boys). Girls' self-portraits include more instances of soft-touching (girls 1.3%, boys

0.2%) and self-touching (girls 19.5%, boys 8.6%) – including touching the face (girls 16.4%, boys 7.1%), sexual self-touching (girls 0.5%, boys 0%), and touching the lips (girls 2.6%, boys 1.5%). It seems that girls' self-portraits exhibit more conventional feminine hand actions compared to those of boys. For the utilitarian touching that Goffman observed was associated with men, there were actually more examples of this among girls' than boys' self portraits, but the difference was small (girls 2.7%, boys 1.8%). A possible explanation for this is that some girls like to take portraits of themselves holding a favourite item, such as cosmetics or some new purchase, in order to show-off, while boys seem less interested in these reasons for self portraits.

Table 8 Hand positions/actions (percentages)

	Girls			Boys			12-15	16-18	All	N=
	All	12-15	16-18	All	12-15	16-18				
Self-touch finger to lips	2.6	3.1	2.4	1.5	0	1.6	2.3	2.0	2.0	41
Self-touch finger to face	16.4	15.4	16.8	7.1	6.7	7.1	13.1	11.5	11.8	235
Self-touch sexual	0.5	1.5	0.1	0	0	0	1.1	0.1	0.2	5
Soft touch	1.3	0.8	1.5	0.2	0	0.2	0.6	0.8	0.8	15
Gesture	2.3	1.2	2.7	1.5	1.1	1.5	1.1	2.1	1.9	38
Utilitarian touch	2.7	1.5	3.1	1.8	2.2	1.8	1.7	2.4	2.2	45
Others	5.4	3.8	5.9	4.4	5.6	4.3	4.3	5.0	4.9	98
No moves or not in frame	68.8	72.7	67.4	83.5	84.4	83.4	75.7	76.2	76.2	1523
N=	1000	260	740	1000	90	910	350	1650	2000	2000

4.5.1.4   Body postures:

Posing for the camera is uncommon in self-portraits. Table 9 shows that only 1 in 5 self-portraits (20%) portrayed the subject posing, with more than twice as many girls' self-portraits showed the subjects posed (girls 27.2%, boys 12.9%). In posed self-portraits of girls from both age groups there is more body-canting (girls 11.6%, boys 6.1%), space-reducing poses (girls 7.8%, boys1.9%), and poses showing the subject hugging or holding an object/a person (girls 3.3%, boys 0.8%) –all of which are associated conventionally with femininity. Space-occupying poses are traditionally associated with masculinity and are evident in more boys' than girls' self-portraits (girls 0.3%, boys 1.9%). Self-portraits by younger girls exhibit a larger proportion of space-reducing poses compared to those of older girls' (younger girls 11.2%, older girls 6.6%), whereas younger boys' photos exhibited more space-occupying poses compared to those of older boys (younger boys 5.6%, older boys 1.5%). 'Sexual body language' was more often displayed in girls' self-portraits, and in both age groups (younger girls 3.5%, older girls 3.4%) compared to older boys' (0.2%); it did not occur in younger boys' photos. For depictions of 'lying/reclining on a bed' or 'intimate contact' poses, girls' self-portraits demonstrated a higher number, but the difference with boys was less than 1%. 'Intimate contact' (i.e. kissing, making out or interacting with another in a provocative way) occurred in only three self-portraits of older girls and one of older boys, but not in younger teenagers' self-portraits, suggesting that visual records of explicit intimacy are infrequent until late adolescence.

Table 9 Body postures (percentages)

	Girls			Boys			12-15	16-18	All	N=
	All	12-15	16-18	All	12-15	16-18				
Body canting	11.6	10.4	12	6.1	2.2	6.5	8.3	9.0	8.8	177
Space reducing poses	7.8	11.2	6.6	1.9	2.2	1.9	8.9	4.0	4.8	97
Sexual body language	3.4	3.5	3.4	0.2	0	0.2	2.6	1.6	1.8	36
Space-occupying	0.3	0	0.4	1.9	5.6	1.5	1.4	1.0	1.1	22
Lying or reclining on bed	2.1	1.2	2.4	1.3	1.1	1.3	1.1	1.8	1.7	34
Intimate contact	0.3	0	0.4	0.1	0	0.1	0	0.2	0.2	4
Hugging an object/a person (non sexual)	0.9	0.8	0.9	0.1	0	0.1	0.6	0.5	0.5	10
Others	0.8	0.8	0.8	1.3	1.1	1.3	0.9	1.1	1.0	21
No pose or body not in frame	72.8	72.3	73	87.1	87.8	87	76.3	80.7	80.0	1599
N=	1000	260	740	1000	90	910	350	1650	2000	2000

4.5.1.5   Mode of dress:

In almost 9 out of 10 self-portraits (88.2%) the subjects were wearing everyday clothes (see Table 10). Boys were more often portrayed wearing everyday outfits than girls (girls 84%, boys 92.3%), and girls' self-portraits more often depicted the subject dressed conservatively (girls 6.6%, boys 0.4%) or suggestively (girls 5%, boys 3.4%). Slightly more self-portraits of boys showed the subjects partially clad (girls 2.3%, boys 3.6%), although these were from the group of older boys, whereas girls' self-portraits showing them partially clad were from both age groups. Younger boys were all portrayed wearing everyday clothes.

4.5.1.6   Revealed body areas:

Slightly more than 9 out of 10 self-portraits (92.1%) focused on the subjects' faces or their faces and bodies dressed in ordinary clothing (see Table 11). There were slightly more girls' self-portraits showing cleavages/bare shoulders than boys' self-portraits showing them bare-chested (girls 5.2%, boys 3.5%). There were 21 photos of girls with their lower bodies dressed only in underwear/showing bare thighs/midriff or even clothed totally in underwear; this applied to none of the boys' self-portraits (girls 2.1%, boys 0%). However, boys' self-portraits more often portrayed them bare chested compared to girls' self-portraits showing the upper body clad in underwear/or bare breasts covered with hands (girls 1.3%, boys 3.6%), perhaps because bare-chested boys are not considered 'socially equivalent' (Kapidzic & Herring, 2011) to girls wearing bras, and are considered more acceptable for display in a public album.

While all of the younger boys' self-portraits were face shots or photos of the face and body dressed in ordinary clothes – in other words, revealing nothing– 7.8% of older boys' self-portraits showed some degree of nudity. Among girls, the numbers of self-portraits that were revealing of parts of the body were similar for both age groups.

Table 10 Mode of dress (percentages)

	Girls			Boys			12-15	16-18	All	N=
	All	12-15	16-18	All	12-15	16-18				
Everyday	84.0	85.8	83.4	92.3	100	91.5	89.4	87.9	88.2	1763
Demure	6.6	5.8	6.9	0.4	0	0.4	4.3	3.3	3.5	70
Suggestive	5.0	6.2	4.6	3.4	0	3.7	4.6	4.1	4.2	84
Partially clad	2.3	1.5	2.6	3.6	0	4	1.1	3.3	3.0	59
Indiscernible	2.1	0.8	2.6	0.3	0	0.3	0.6	1.3	1.2	24
N=	1000	260	740	1000	90	910	350	1650	2000	2000

Table 11 Revealed body areas (percentages)

	Girls			Boys			12-15	16-18	All	N=
	All	12-15	16-18	All	12-15	16-18				
Face	91.3	90.4	91.6	92.9	100	92.2	92.9	91.9	92.1	1842
Girls' cleavage/bare shoulders; Boys' partially revealing chest	5.2	5.4	5.1	3.5	0	3.8	4.0	4.4	4.4	87
Girls' upper body clothed in underwear/ bare breasts covered with hands; Boys' bare chested	1.3	1.2	1.4	3.6	0	4	0.9	2.8	2.4	49
Lower body in underwear/ bare thighs or lower abdomen	1.4	1.5	1.4	0	0	0	1.1	0.6	0.7	14
Full length body in underwear	0.7	1.2	0.5	0	0	0	0.9	0.2	0.4	7
Others	0.1	0.4	0	0	0	0	0.3	0	0	1
N=	1000	260	740	1000	90	910	350	1650	2000	2000

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4.5.2 Examining teenagers' profile self-portraits

This section focuses on individual teenagers and whether the self-portraits used as their Wretch profile pictures demonstrate similar gender differences to those highlighted in representational styles, and whether these differences are statistically significant.

Of the 200 sampled teenagers, 85 girls and 84 boys had their profile pages open to the public[37] and had posted a self-portrait as a profile photo. The 169 valid photos were coded using the same six variables. Each category within the variables is examined using a chi-square test of independence (or Fisher's exact test, where counts were less than 5) to check whether the differences between genders are statistically significant. Age differences are not analysed in this section due to the disproportionate age ratio and small sample size, composed of one self-portrait of each individual rather than the ten in the previous section. The next section focuses on gender differences, and reports only differences that are statistically significant.

4.5.2.1   Mouth area expression

Table 12 shows that 7 in 10 profile photographs (69.8%) portrayed the teenagers with some kind of mouth area expressions. Controlled smile (26%) and puckered or pouting lips (17.8%) are, respectively, the second and third most common movements. In terms of gender difference, the results tally with the patterns observed in section 4.5.1. Girls' profile photos portraying the girlishness or childlike puckering or pouting significantly outnumbered those of boys (girls 24.7%, boys 10.7%): x^2(1, N=169)= 5.665, p=0.017. The gender-neutral controlled smile is also more frequent in girls' profile photographs (girls 36.5%, boys 15.5%), x^2 (1, N=169) = 9.67, p=0.002. On the other hand, boys are significantly more likely than girls to *not* show any mouth

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[37] Wretch assigns different URLs to the individual's album page and profile page. Unlike Facebook, which treats the individual's profile page as the portal to her/his other digital contents on Facebook (e.g. photographs, wall, info), on Wretch one can set the profile to be private, or inactivate the profile page while making the album page accessible. Therefore, in this analysis, there are instances of public albums but closed profile pages.

expression in their profile photographs (girls 16.5%, boys 44%), x^2 (1, N=169) =15.249, p<0.001. All other gender differences are not statistically significant.

These results support the first hypothesis that girls' self-portraits will exhibit a range of mouth expressions, whereas boys' self-portraits will exhibit fewer mouth expressions.

4.5.2.2   Facial expression

Table 13 shows that cool/fierce is the most popular (34.9%) facial expression among the 169 valid profile photographs, with another 28.4% of profile photographs showing facial expressions that are not gender-stereotypical (i.e. other), and 24.9% showing subjects looking cute/vulnerable. Again, facial expression expressions are gender-related: 40% of girls' profile photographs display the cute/vulnerable look compared to only 9.5% of boys', x^2(1, N=169)= 21.011, p<0.001. On the other hand, 54.8% of boys' profile photos displayed the stereotypically masculine cool/fierce look compared to only 15.3% of girls', x^2(1, N=169)= 28.962, p<0.001. Combined with the lack of mouth expression in almost half of boys' profile pictures, we can conclude that boys are less expressive than girls in terms of 'making faces' in self-portraits. For funny/dramatic, there are no significant gender differences, indicating that boys and girls are equally likely to use self-portraits to project a playful self. Finally, there are no significance differences for the sexy/sensual look.

The results partially confirm the second hypothesis that 'girls' self-portraits exhibit more cute/vulnerable or sexy/sensual looks and boys' self-portraits exhibit more cool/fierce looks.

Table 12 Profile picture: Mouth area expressions (percentages)

	Girls	Boys	All
Puckered/Pouting*	24.7	10.7	17.8
Sensuous moves	0	1.2	0.6
Lips parted no smile	8.2	13.1	10.7
Controlled smile*	36.5	15.5	26
Bright smile	3.5	4.8	4.1
Pressed lips	1.2	4.8	3
Lowered lips	2.4	0	1.2
Mouth wide open	0	0	0
Other than above	3.5	0	1.8
No moves*	16.5	44	30.2
Not applicable (not in frame)	3.5	6	4.7
N=	85	84	169

*categories that show statistically significant difference between girls and boys.

Table 13 Profile picture: Facial expression (percentages)

	Girls	Boys	All
Cute/vulnerable*	40	9.5	24.9
Cool/fierce*	15.3	54.8	34.9
Funny/dramatic	4.7	8.3	6.5
Sexy/sensual	1.2	0	0.6
Others	34.1	22.6	28.4
Not applicable (not in frame or too blurry)	4.7	4.8	4.7
N=	85	84	169

*categories that show statistically significant difference between girls and boys.

4.5.2.3   Hand positions/actions

Table 14 shows that almost 8 out of 10 profile photographs (77.5%) do not portray hands doing anything in particular. Boys were significantly more likely than girls to *not* employ hand gestures (girls 65.9%, boys 89.3%), x^2(1, N=169)= 13.277, p<0.001. Girls' rather than boys' portraits are significantly more likely to demonstrate self-touching (finger to lips, finger to face, sexual) (girls 25.9%, boys 7.1%), x^2(1, N=169)= 10.733, p=0.001. All other gender differences are not statistically significant.

These results provide partial support for the third hypothesis that girls' self-portraits demonstrate more self-touching and soft-touching, while 'utilitarian' gestures do not show significant gender differences. Taken together with the findings for utilitarian touch in Section 4.5.1.3, these findings do not support the hypothesis and we can conclude that the utilitarian touch in the case of self-portraits is not associated with masculinity.

4.5.2.4   Body posture

Table 15 shows that almost 9 out of 10 profile photographs (88.2%) do not show teenagers in body poses, and gender differences persist. Boys are slightly more likely than girls *not* to pose in profile photos (boys 96.4%, girls 80%), x^2(1, N=169)= 10.929, p=0.001. Girls are significantly more likely to adopt stereotypically feminine poses (body canting or space-reducing poses) compared with boys (girls 14.1%, boys 2.4%), x^2(1, N=169)= 7.66, p=0.006. All other gender differences are not statistically significant.

These results partially confirm the fourth hypothesis that girls' self-portraits demonstrate more deferent or suggestive poses and boys' self-portraits show few poses. There are no significant gender differences for suggestive and dominant poses.

Table 14 Profile picture: Hand positions/actions (percentages)

	Girls	Boys	All
Self-touch finger to lips	0	2.4	1.2
Self-touch finger to face*	25.9	4.8	15.4
Self-touch sexual	0	0	0
Soft touch	0	0	0
Gesture	5.9	3.6	4.7
Utilitarian touch	1.2	0	0.6
Others	1.2	0	0.6
No particular moves/Hands not in frame*	65.9	89.3	77.5
N=	85	84	169

*categories that show statistically significant difference between girls and boys.

Table 15 Profile picture: Body postures (percentages)

	Girls	Boys	All
Body canting*	7.1	2.4	4.7
Space reducing poses*	7.1	0	3.6
Sexual body language	1.2	0	0.6
Space-occupying	0	1.2	0.6
Lying or reclining on bed	2.4	0	1.2
Intimate contact	0	0	0
Hugging an object/a person (non sexual)	0	0	0
Others	2.4	0	1.2
No particular pose/ body not in frame*	80	96.4	88.2
N=	85	84	169

*categories that show statistically significant difference between girls and boys.

4.5.2.5   Mode of dress and revealed body parts

Tables 16 and 17 for mode of dress and revealed areas of the body show that there are no significant gender differences. With the exception of five profile portraits of girls wearing provocative clothing revealing cleavage/bare shoulders, most of the valid photos show the teenage subjects wearing ordinary clothing. This difference between girls' self-portraits and boys' is close to being statistically significant when calculated with Fisher's exact test, $p=0.059$ (two sided).

There is only some confirmation for the fifth hypothesis that girls' self-portraits show the subjects revealing more skin and highlighting certain body parts to suggest sexual attractiveness compared to boys' self-portraits. However, based on the findings in Section 4.5.1.5, we can still say that the hypothesis is formulated in the right direction.

Table 16 Profile picture: Mode of dress (percentages)

	Girls	Boys	All
Everyday	94.1	100	97
Demure	0	0	0
Suggestive	5.9	0	3
Partially clad	0	0	0
Indiscernible	0	0	0
N=	85	84	169

Table 17 Profile picture: Revealed body areas (percentages)

	Girls	Boys	All
Face	94.1	100	97
Girls' cleavage/bare shoulders; Boys' partially revealing chest	5.9	0	3
Girls' top in underwear/ bare breasts covered with hands; Boys' bare chest	0	0	0
Lower body in underwear/ bare thighs or lower abdomen	0	0	0
Full body in underwear	0	0	0
Others	0	0	0
N=	85	84	169

4.5.3 Typology of overall representational style in self-portraits

So far we have identified the representational styles used in self-portraits, and shown that boys and girls often prefer different styles. However, not all girls represent themselves as cute/vulnerable, and not all boys like to look cool/fierce in self-portraits. We need to investigate how individual elements are combined to create an overall representational style, what these overall styles are and, importantly, how teenagers go beyond gender conventional ways to represent themselves.

To do this, I conducted a cluster analysis using the SPSS two-step cluster technique recommended for handling large datasets (over 1,000) and categorical data (SPSS Inc., 2001). The clustering algorithm used the log-likelihood distance measure based on its ability to handle categorical variables. After the first step of pre-clustering, the standard agglomerative hierarchical clustering method on the pre-clusters was used to form the final clusters. The final number of clusters was selected to be optimal using the default auto-clustering algorithm based on a combination of Schwarz Bayesian Criterion (BIC) and log-likelihood distance (Garson, 2009). No outlier handling was applied since the aim was to find the 'natural groupings' (Chatfield & Collins, 1980, p. 212) of self-portraits according to their traits and to identify the main patterns in the sample. This clustering result was considered the best fit based on the homogeneity within clusters, the heterogeneity among clusters, and the ease of interpretability.

The cluster analysis was conducted using the 2,000 self-portraits (cluster analysis is most efficient with a large sample size (SPSS Inc, 2001). All the variables ('facial expression', 'mouth area expression', 'hand positions/actions, 'body posture', 'mode of dress' and 'revealed areas of the body') were included. Four clusters can be identified as representing prototypical self-portraits. Table 18 presents the resulting clusters and two main characteristics in each cluster.

Table 18 Top two characteristics per coding variable per cluster (percentages; N=2,000)

	The Cool	The Childlike	The Mixed	The Revealing
	N=502	N=610	N=731	N=157
	Girls 17%, Boys 83%	Girls 70%, Boys 30%	Girls 55%, Boys 45%	Girls 55%, Boys 45%
Mouth	No moves or N/A (79%)	Puckered/Pouted (61%)	Controlled Smile (59%)	No moves or N/A (43%)
	Lips parted no smile (7%)	Flattened lips (11%)	Bright smile (13%)	Puckered/Pouted (24%)
Face	Cool/Fierce (74%)	Cute/Vulnerable (69%)	Others (66%)	Cute/Vulnerable (36%)
	Not in frame/ blurry (25%)	Funny/Dramatic (30%)	Cute/Vulnerable (18%)	Cool/Fierce (32%)
Hands	No moves or N/A (85%)	No moves or N/A (69%)	No moves or N/A (78%)	No moves or N/A (70%)
	Others (5%)	Self-touch: face (18%)	Self-touch: face (11%)	Self-touch: face (13%)
Posture	No pose or N/A (94%)	No pose or N/A (77%)	No pose or N/A (78%)	No pose or N/A (55%)
	Space-reducing (3%)	Body cants (11%)	Body cants (13%)	Sexual body language (21%)
Body	Face (99.8%)	Face (100%)	Face (100%)	Girls' cleavage/ bare shoulders; Boys' partially-revealing chest (55%)
	Others (0.1%)	(0%)	(0%)	Girls' upper body in underwear/bare breasts yet covered; Boys' bare chest (31%)
Dress	Everyday outfit (97.8%)	Everyday outfit (90%)	Everyday outfit (98%)	Suggestively clad (51%)
	Demure (0.9%)	Demure (7%)	Demure (0.8%)	Partially clad (38%)

4.5.3.1 Style 1: The cool

'The cool' is the first type of overall representation style identified, referring to 502 self-portraits (see Figure 4 for an exemplar self-portrait)[38]. These self-portraits are predominantly boys (416) compared to girls (86). The variables 'mouth area expression' and 'facial expression' are the main differentiators for this cluster. Subjects appear cool/fierce, and often unsmiling or a controlled smile or smirk. The photos all show the subjects dressed in everyday clothes with no particular body poses. They resemble ID photos, which require minimum display of face and body expression. In the majority of self-portraits hands are not in frame; where they do figure, they are posed in less gender-conventional gestures (i.e. 'other' hand gestures) or utilitarian touches. The lack of expression in this category of self-portraits matches the representational style conventionally associated with masculinity.

Figure 4 An illustrative photograph of 'the cool'

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[38] All the photos used as exemplars are of adult users of Wretch Album who volunteered their self-portraits for this study. They were informed about the research project and gave their consent in writing; they were asked whether they wanted their self-portraits to be anonymised in academic publications. The copyrights of these photos remain with the owners.

4.5.3.2   Style 2: The childlike

'The childlike' includes 610 self-portraits (see Figures 5 to 8 for examples), the majority of which were girls' photos (428 girls and 182 boys). The variables 'mouth area expression', 'facial expression' and 'hand positions/actions' were important for differentiating this cluster. All the photos were face-shots of the subjects, with most looking cute/vulnerable, and some making funny/dramatic faces. Most show puckered/pouting lips, some have lips pressed together or in a controlled smile. Most shots did not show hands or fingers; those that do are mostly in self-touching of face or lips poses. Among the four types, this category has the largest number of instances of self-touching of face or lips. Most of the self-portraits showed only faces; where the body was in frame, it displayed conventional feminine body language - body canting or space-reducing poses. In most photos, the subjects are wearing ordinary clothes, some quite demure. Photographs in this cluster are characterised by traits such as cute, delicate and playful, as if imitating children.

Figure 5 An illustrative photograph of 'the childlike'

Figure 6 An illustrative photograph of 'the childlike'

Figure 7 An illustrative photograph of 'the childlike'

Figure 8 An illustrative photograph of 'the childlike'

4.5.3.3   Style 3: The mixed

'The mixed' includes 731 photos (see Figure 9), fairly balanced between genders (400 girls and 331 boys). They are mostly face-shots with facial expressions that are not conventionally masculine or feminine, although some subjects put on a cute face and others try to look cool. Most faces have controlled smiles; some show bright smiles and in a few the mouths are expressionless. In most photos the hands are not in frame, although some show subjects self-touching their faces, or other less conventional gestures. In those photos that show the subject's body, the pose is frequently body canting. Almost all subjects are wearing everyday clothes. This cluster is characterised by codes of representation that combine feminine and masculine and other less stereotypical codes in one frame.

Figure 9 An illustrative photograph of 'the mixed'

4.5.3.4   Type 4: The revealing

'The revealing' category is the least well represented in self-portraits (157), 86 self-portraits belonging to 28 girls, and 71 self-portraits belonging to 24 boys (see Figure 10 for an example). The variables 'body posture', 'hand movement', 'body part portrayed' and 'mode of dress' mostly differentiate this cluster, whose defining feature is dress which is demure, sexy and showing parts of the body. Although a few subjects' faces show sensual facial expressions, cute and cool are the most popular looks. Mouths vary from puckered/pouting lips, to controlled smile, to expressionless. Most photos do not show hands, although a few show sexual-touching (e.g. the breasts), and some show the subjects touching their faces or lips. There are no particular body poses; a few are looking provocative and some poses are body canting or space-reducing. In all the photos the body is revealed naked to some degree.

Figure 10 An illustrative photograph of 'the revealing'

4.5.4 Degrees of variation in each individual's 10 self-portraits

We next examine whether and to what extent the subjects use self-portraiture to experiment with and explore different styles of self. To examine the variations in each individual's ten self-portraits, I re-examined the photos using the four clusters as prototypes, to determine to what extent the sampled self-portraits are similar to or different from these prototypes, that is, how many of each individual's self-portraits are of the same overall representational style. Table 19 shows that around half (47.5%) of the teenagers have between five and six self-portraits representing themselves in the same style (24.5% teenagers have five self-portraits in the same cluster, and 23% have six self-portraits in the same cluster); 38.5% of teenagers have at least seven self-portraits in the same cluster. In other words, in almost 9 out of 10 teenagers' (86%) self-portraits the style is fairly consistent and can be categorised within the same prototype; only a few (14%) represent themselves in more different ways across prototypes. The implication is that, despite claims that the internet being used for identity play, in this study, most teenagers use self-portraiture to experiment with their self-image, but within more or less the same style, rather than dramatically subverting their existing self-image.

Table 20 shows that in 27.5% of teenagers' self-portraits (i.e. size of dominant cluster out of 10 self-portraits) show them looking 'cool', and 90% of these are of boys

(only 9% are girls). In 34% of teenagers' self-portraits the subjects have adopted a 'childlike' look (75% girls and 25% boys). In 33.5% of teens portraits they adopt a 'mixed' look (56.7% girls and 43.3% boys). Only 5% of teenagers' self-portraits fall into the 'revealing' category (60% girls and 40% boys). This result suggests that the micro gender pattern in individuals' ten photos is in line with the macro gender patterns observed in the previous analysis of 2,000 self-portraits and 169 profile self-portraits.

Table 19 The number of self-portraits in the same cluster by gender (in counts)

		Number of self-portraits falling in the same cluster								
		3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total
Gender	Girls	1	7	31	20	18	11	10	2	100
	Boys	2	18	18	26	14	8	7	7	100
Total		3 (1.5%)	25 (12.5%)	49 (24.5%)	46 (23%)	32 (16%)	19 (9.5%)	17 (8.5%)	9 (4.5%)	200 (100%)

Table 20 The size of dominant cluster by gender (in counts)

		Most self-portraits are in the cluster…				
		The cool	The childlike	The mixed	The revealing	Total
Gender	Girls	5	51	38	6	100
	Boys	50	17	29	4	100
Total		55 (27.5%)	68 (34.0%)	67 (33.5%)	10 (5.0%)	200 (100%)

4.6 Discussion

This thesis investigates public concern in part over teenagers' self-portraiture on SNS. This chapter used the popular website Wretch as an exemplar site to investigate whether young people use conventional gendered representational styles to anchor their self-representation and presentation online, and to what extent they use self-portraiture to explore ways of being other than within conventional gendered patterns.

The first two parts of the analysis focused on identifying styles of representation and their relation to gender. The first part examined 2,000 self-portraits collected from 200 teenagers; the second examined the profile picture of the 169 (out of 200) teenagers who have a public profile page *and* use a self-portrait as their profile picture. The results show very similar trends in more frequent adoption of certain styles of representation in the self-portraits of boys or of girls. For example, girls' self-portraits tend to be more expressive –in terms of mouth expressions, overall facial expressions, hand positions or actions and body poses while boys' self-portraits tend to be 'cooler', and their faces and bodies more expressionless. Puckered/pouting lips, cute/vulnerable faces, self-touching and soft-touching, body canting, revealing clothing and a focus on body parts (traits conventionally associated with femininity) are more frequent in girls' self-portraits.

However, some of the hypothesized gender differences are not significant. Utilitarian touches are more frequent in girls' self-portraits (both the 2,000 self-portraits and 169 profile pictures), perhaps because more girls like to self-portray with a favourite object, or simply because the original commercial context in which this gender display trait was observed does not apply in the self-representation context. Feminine suggestive poses and masculine dominant poses also show no significant gender differences in the profile pictures. However, this might be due to the small sample size in this case; the findings from Section 4.5.1.4 show that suggestive poses are more frequent in girls' self-portraits, and dominant poses are more frequent in boys' self-portraits, indicating that hypothesis (H4) is formulated in the right direction.

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Parts 3 and 4 of the analysis show similar gender differences. The cluster analysis showed that the stereotypically masculine cool, and the feminine childlike/cute representation styles are popular in girls' and boys' self-portraits, with the gender composition in each cluster matching the masculinity/femininity division (i.e. the cool style is represented in 83% of boys' self-portraits, and the childlike style is represented in 70% of girls' self-portraits). In the 4th part of the analysis, we see that 51 out of 100 girls adopt childlike styles most frequently in their 10 self-portraits, while for 50 out of 100 boys 'the cool' is predominant in their 10 self-portraits.

Overall, these findings suggest that what Goffman (1979) describes as 'hyper-ritualized gender acts' is prominent in these self-portraits, and is mostly consistent with patterns of representation in the advertisements reviewed at the beginning of this chapter. The large number of boys' self-portraits shows the subjects as expressionless or with minimal expression, suggesting that an unaffected masculine image may be what these boys prefer to construct for themselves. The large number of girls' self-portraits showing the subjects as cute and childlike displaying stereotypically feminine body language whose visual effects symbolize the feminine qualities of affective emotion, childlike cuteness and vulnerability (Herring & Zelenkauskaite, 2009), suggest that this is the impression girls prefer to give. These (hyper) childlike/cute expressions and gestures mimic the characteristics that make babies cute: disproportionately large eyes, plump cheeks, soft skin, and uncoordinated gestures (Lorenz, 1943, as cited in Morreal, 1991, p. 40). The effect is created by the subject opening her eyes very wide, pouting or puckering the lips, or pressing the lips flatly together to appear like a displeased or innocent child and shooting the self-portrait from a downward 45 degree angle to create the visual effect of a small face. The hand(s) or fingers are shown gently touching the lips, face, head or hair, giving the impression of soft delicate skin and hair that is pleasurable to touch.

The analysis shows that using sexuality to represent oneself in self-portraits is less common than media hype and public concern would indicate. My examination of 169

profile pictures showed that only 5.9% of photos – all girls - show the subject wearing a provocative outfit. The clustering results in the third part of the analysis based on 2,000 self-portraits posted in albums, showed that 7.8% of the total sample fall into 'the revealing' type. This may be because the profile picture is usually chosen to present an overall image of self, so teenagers will be more reserved about choosing a sexy self-portrait; however, albums can be themed, and a sexy self-portrait can be interpreted as a part of oneself, rather than a representation of the whole self as in the case of a profile picture. While the sample is not representative, in the few cases of revealing self-portraits, there are more girls' self-portraits, and this result is consistent with the stereotype that women tend to be portrayed in the media as sexy. This may be because girls are keener to express their sexuality through self-portraiture, and also have more sartorial choices, which enable them to dress in demure or suggestive ways. For boys and men it is more difficult to 'dress sexily' apart from showing a naked torso. However, the low frequency of such representations may be due to the fact that the samples were drawn from a larger sampling population where the implied or disclosed age was between 13 and 18. It may be that young people who post revealing self-portraits do not disclose their ages for a number of reasons such as 'cannot be bothered to post age' or because 'revealing their real age might get them into trouble'.

A particularly interesting finding from the examination of the 2,000 self-portraits is that, while there were self-portraits of girls from both age groups depicting subjects with sexy or sensual expressions, among boys, this applied only to self-portraits of older boys. Although this difference was not tested for statistical significance due to the small proportion of younger boys' self-portraits in the sample, it may indicate that girls learn from an early age that sexuality is an important aspect of femininity and, indeed, of self-presentation, while boys remain unaware of this until later in adolescence.

While gender differences in representational styles persist, we cannot conclude that this is a complete picture. The difference between gender and the employment of conventionally feminine/masculine styles is not so rigid. The third step in the analysis shows that, if we compare the numbers of girls' and boys' self-portraits adopting the representational styles conventionally associated with the opposite gender, the number

of boys' self-portraits adopting the feminine styles of childlike cuteness is twice as high as the number of girls' self portraits adopting the masculine code (i.e. the cute style is adopted by 30% of boys' self-portraits, and the cool style is adopted by 17% of girls' self-portraits). This could be explained in two ways. First, teenage boys in the transition from children to adults can adopt a childlike/feminine demeanour without worrying that it is not sufficiently 'masculine'. Second, the conventional masculine/feminine division is gradually transforming to accommodate more varieties, and displaying qualities traditionally associated with femininity has become more socially acceptable in Asia, exemplified by the increasing representations of effeminate male celebrities/entertainers dubbed as 'flower-pretty man' (Huā měi nán) in Asia. Girls may feel more compelled to accentuate the feminine qualities of beauty and cuteness because physical attractiveness is what they perceive to be important in how they are assessed in society.

The third and fourth steps in the study address whether teenagers use representational styles to define themselves that are not gender-specific, and the extent to which they use self-portraiture for identity play. The clustering results show that around 37% (731) of the 2,000 self-portraits examined employ a mixed variety of styles of representation. For example, 1 in 3 self-portraits in the sample did not emphasise gender or sexuality. The fact that 72% of photos in 'the mixed' cluster portray the subjects with bright or controlled smiles indicates that whatever the body pose, most photos categorised as 'mixed' demonstrate some degree of friendliness, which is in line with most people's desire to project a favourable image on SNS by appearing a friendly, likeable person (Gibbs, Ellison, & Heino, 2006; Siibak, 2009). The fourth part of the analysis shows that around 9 out of 10 teenagers use the same style (cool, childlike, mixed or revealing) to represent themselves in at least half of their sampled 10 self-portraits; in other words, only very few of the sampled teenagers adopt a range of different styles – and even those who adopt a mixed style are unlikely also to use gender-stereotypical styles to represent themselves. These findings suggest that despite the opportunity to use self-portraiture for identity play, teenagers still mostly use self-portraiture to represent themselves in consistent ways, whether gender-specific or not. Huffaker and Calvert's (2005) study of teenagers' language used in their blogs provides

similar results and shows that while teenagers used blog content to explore issues such as sexuality, their online expressions of self tend to 'stay closer to reality' (para. 1).

The limitation of this analysis is its sample size. The problems involved in identifying a target sample reduced the number of independent samples – such as 2,000 self-portraits from 2,000 individuals – that could be tested for statistical difference (step 1 in the analysis). While inferential statistics were collected in the second step, the small size of the independent sample (i.e. 169 profile self-portraits) does not allow traits and trends to stand out. Also, the disproportionate size of the two age groups reduced the possibility for inferential statistics, therefore we cannot examine the role of age as an explanatory variable in the gendered styles of representation and identity play.

4.7   Conclusion

Self-representation has progressive potential to challenge conventional ways of representation; however, we observed a majority of stereotypical gender representations, with some hyper-gendered self-representations, which are observed in teenagers' visual representations elsewhere in cyberspace (cf. Thomas, 2007). Thumim (2009b, p. 25) notes that 'it would be both simplistic and idealistic to think in terms of regressive mainstream representations and progressive self-representations: there is always a cross over as each influences the other'. While the homogeneity in some self-portraits may appear to deny the possibility of the dominant media representations being challenged, it should be noted that every self-portrait is produced by the individual teenager in a specific context involving macro-institutional forces such as Wretch's commercial promotion of 'beautiful chicks', meso-level factors such as peers or family, and micro-level personal idiosyncrasies; the process of producing self-representation has personal importance for the individual despite the seeming lack of originality in these self-portraits. In some cases, (hyper-)gendered acts of self-representation may be online-only performances that bear no resemblance to the offline self-presentation. In some cases the (hyper-) gendered acts are a representation of the offline persona and in others there may not be a clear distinction between online and offline. Therefore, asking whether self-representation online can go beyond conventional gendered representational styles may

not be a constructive question since it does not move our understandings beyond 'yes and no'.

A follow-up question might be what lies behind these gendered displays of self. What do gendered styles of representation express, and why? An exploration of the intricacies and ambiguities inherent in the process of self-representation demands investigation beyond the end-product self-portrait. The findings from this content analysis suggest we need to know more about the individual considerations and structural forces influencing teenagers' practices of self-portraiture. This is pursued further in Chapters 6 and 7, where I discuss girls' self-presentation strategies and how they relate to the construction of their gender identities. When taking a self-portrait a girl is not thinking about whether she looks 'stereotypically feminine or masculine today', but rather what is the best way to present herself as 'looking good, natural, pretty, happy, friendly, sexy, likeable, etc.'. Thus, stereotypical gendered representations are part of a desire to project a 'likeable' self-image, one perceived to be 'ideal'. What these stereotypes help to convey is not a stereotype per se, but a perception of a norm of social acceptance and physical attractiveness – qualities that are particularly important to teenagers.

Chapter 5 Interpersonal Communication via Self-Portraiture

> The image is an extension of one's identity, reflecting aspects of one's personality, relationships, and lifestyle – which is why the theft of one's image, as sometimes happens, feels like a violation not only of ownership but of self. (Suler, 2008, p. 556)

5.1 Introduction

Communicating with the peer group plays a fundamental role in the identity development of teenagers (Subrahmanyam, Smahel, & Greenfield, 2006). As teenagers 'reorient' themselves from family to peer group in adolescence, mediated communication technologies, such as mobile telephony and the internet, become important in this task of 'emancipation' (Ling & Haddon, 2008). I argue that online self-portraiture serves as one such form of mediated communication that opens up another way of communication in the age of digital and social media. As discussed in Section 1.6, the popularisation of camera technologies offer new affordance for photography to be easily integrated into everyday life as an expressive, communicative practice. Photographs, no matter how ordinary or meaningless they may appear to the uninvolved viewer, are an individual's attempt to capture sensation and affects as they are experienced in the moment, and it is by capturing and relating these transience of one's life that bear personal significance that a biographical story is constructed and presented to oneself and others. In Chapter 4, we have analysed and identified common representational styles in relation to gender in girls' and boys' self-portraits. Before moving on to discuss what those representational styles may mean to girls in the next Chapter (6), in this chapter we first address the equally important question of why are we seeing self-portraits in the public arena online. In other words, why do girls post self-portraits and other personal photographs online? I consider self-portraiture as a photographic communicative practice, and examine the construction of girls' Album spaces, and the role of self-portraiture – as a kind of self-disclosure –in their online and offline interpersonal communication. The analysis brings together perspectives on personal photography, mobile communication, and personal relationships in offline and online contexts.

This chapter begins with a review of empirical studies that address how personal photographic practices and online/mobile photo-sharing serve as a way of communication. This is a continuation of the discussions in Section 1.6 on the changes and continuities in personal photographic practices, and argues that affordable camera phones and digital cameras have encouraged the use of photographs for personal communicative purposes in addition to the conventional memorial purpose. Banal moments and everyday experiences can be shared, facilitating self-disclosure, which is key to developing relationships as part of one's identity work as discussed in Section 2.4.2. The chapter then moves on to examine girls' everyday engagement with camera technologies, the reasons why girls share personal photographs on Wretch, how they construct their Album spaces, how self-portraiture function as visual self-disclosure online, and the particular social uses that are made of these photographs.

5.2   Communicating through Photo-Sharing Online

The reasons why personal photography such as self-portraiture is being used as a vehicle for the identity work of self-disclosure and communication are related to advances in camera technologies. Photography has progressed from analogue to digital, to mobile and from expensive and exclusive to affordable and thus popular. Photographs are no longer viewed mostly in private by individuals; they are now easily and widely shared. These changes have allowed photography to record individual, everyday, intimate details and to be used for communicative purposes rather than being a 'festive technology' reserved for the traditional social, solemn, commemorative and celebratory occasions referred to by Bourdieu (1990a, p. 26). This shift to using photographs to communicate and affirm personal relations is especially prominent among teenagers and young adults, who use photographs for communication and peer-bonding (van Dijck, 2008).

The use of personal photographs in the digital age is summarized by Gye (2007) as being for private autobiographical construction of personal and group memory; self-

expression and self-presentation; and to aid storytelling and experience sharing which are conducive to building and maintaining personal relationships. Photographic practices, to express how one sees the self and one's surroundings, produce statements of identity. In scanning photographs, we are contemplating our identities, sifting through memories and personal history, to come to terms with what the photographs mean to us now. By this means, we reconstruct a retrospective (auto)biography, constituted of what Holland (1997) calls 'acts of recognition' of the self.

Cameras built into mobile devices can be considered a microcosm of the technological advances in personal photographic practice, in terms of portability and connectivity. The cameraphone is considered an 'intimate' photographic device because, at a personal level, the individualised, intimate nature of cameraphone imagery enables a private relation between phone and user (van Dijck, 2008). To put simply in Palmer's (2005) words, 'the "Nokia moment" is more intimate than the "Kodak moment"' (as cited in Gye, 2007). In fact, the camera phone may be so intimate to us that one of the typical photographic practices and rituals fashioned by it is self-portraiture (Lasen, 2005).

However, such individualised use does not necessarily encourage attention to the self at the expense of sociality, for at the social level, this same intimacy afforded by the camera phone and its connectivity enable a new communicative 'performative ritual' (van Dijck, 2008, p.61). This is made possible through instantaneous image-messaging, through which a sense of 'intimate, visual co-presence' (Ito, 2005) is created, as if the other person is, at the affective level, intimately connected and present. The camera phone not only transmits the visual image displayed on the screen, it calls on the receiver to construct a mental image and use imagination to fill the gap in the mobile exchange, allowing '[empathetic participation] in the world and [producing] an effect of acculturating intimate experiences' (Riviere, 2005, p. 179). In this way, the distinction between public and private is traversed, time and physical space are relocated to fit the current contexts of sender and receiver (Reading, 2008). For example, a girl can snap a self-portrait of her presence at a favourite band's concert and share it with a friend who

is unable to be there. The camera phone image acts as a substitute for spoken language, it is a visual language whose significance lies not so much in its pictorial form or the capacity to capture reality, but in its function as a visual conversation. In other words, camera phone photographs are valued for their social meaning, of 'touching base' and showing affect, rather than serving the conventional purpose of photography. This has resonances with Ito's (2009) suggestion that the primary purpose of young people's communicative acts on social media or in text messaging is to occupy a shared social presence rather than to convey actual messages.

The empirical study by Kindberg, Spasojevic, Fleck, and Sellen (2005) finds that using the camera phone for social and individual purposes is equally important and that both uses can overlap and intertwine. They propose reasons why people take images using camera phones along two dimensions according to objectives. The first dimension refers to whether images are captured for 'affective' or 'functional' purposes; the second dimension refers to whether images are intended for 'social' or 'individual' use. Based on these distinctions and a further breakdown of intentions, they propose six categories. For example, a close-up self-portrait of a girl's sad face may appear narcissistic and be categorised as affective-individual. However, when posted online for viewing by friends, it may be serving an affective-social purpose of informing these friends that: 'Hey, I'm feeling blue today'. Therefore, not all photographs fall neatly into a single category–some can serve several purposes. Other photographs fit none of the proposed six categories. However, we will refer to them in our later exploration of participants' photographs shared online.

Although the studies referred to discuss camera phone photographs shared mainly through mobile messaging, other camera technology innovations – single-use cameras and mobile devices fitted with cameras - have become more affordable and more popular, accompanying the spread of sharing photographs on personal homepages and SNS such as Wretch, Flickr and Facebook. Thus photographs taken with single-use cameras or mobile devices can also be intimate, personal and communicative. Although photographs shared online are asynchronous – unlike the synchronous, temporality of

the present that Ito (2005) previously stressed about mobile image-messaging, photographs that are shared afterwards can still create a sense of co-presence.

The term co-presence highlights the centrality of the experience –the feeling of being together – of sharing photographs, and is particularly important when using photographs to communicate online. A casual browse through Wretch or other photo-sharing sites show very ordinary photographs juxtaposed with quite remarkable ones. Many posters of self-portraits post dozens showing the subject looking in a mirror, wearing almost identical facial expressions. So why post all these photographs? In a study of why young people share photographs online, Oeldorf-Hirsch and Sundar (2010) found that increasingly it is done for social communication purposes, such as 'seeking and showcasing experiences' and 'social connection/bonding'. Another study confirms the importance of experience sharing in photo sharing online. Based on the research on mobloggers who regularly posted photographs on Flickr, Petersen (2008) argues that people posted photographs not to 'transmit the "meaning" of the experience but the sensation of the experience' (p. 140). That is, when the photograph is taken, the affect and sensation experienced at that moment are transformed into the still image, and the sensation is so banal and 'everyday' that it is 'pre-individual' (p. 141), in other words, the viewers can relate to and find commonality in the affective sensations embodied in photographs.

Although it might seem that snapping and sharing mundane experiences is the result of technological advances, it is not new behaviour. Tong and Walther (2011) show that the sharing of ordinary experiences and unremarkable everyday life events has always been important for maintaining relationships although it has not been the subject of study until now: 'Debriefing' about what happened during the time apart is a useful strategy for both parties to maintain continuity in the relationship (Tardy & Dindia, 2006). It is less about the quality of the content than about keeping absent relational partners – intimate and non-intimate – updated. Thus, it would be more accurate to argue that affordable camera technologies have increased capture of the ordinary as well as the extraordinary, and that computer-mediated environments enhance the salience and

prevalence of such mundaneness, leading users increasingly to adapt the already existing offline mundane self-disclosure to their online communication.

In the following I investigate why girls create Wretch accounts and the variety of their motivations to have an online presence. I discuss the characteristics of their Wretch Albums, focusing on content and stylistic features such as photographic subjects and the audio-visual elements in their Album. I continue by examining self-portraiture as self-disclosure that facilitates communication and relationship development. The chapter ends with some specific examples of how photographs, especially self-portraits, play an important social role in girls' interpersonal relationships.

5.3   Everyday Engagement with Cameras, and Photo-Sharing on Wretch

Traditionally, camera phone and single-purpose analogue/digital cameras served different purposes. Digital cameras were reserved for 'noteworthy moments bracketed off from the mundane' (Okabe & Ito, 2003, para. 8), and camera phones were more 'intimate and ubiquitous' and more often used for personal authorship and archives of the 'fragments of everyday life' (Okabe & Ito, 2006). With the advances in camera technologies discussed above, this division, as Rantavuo (2008) observes, exists only at the level of discourse, and in practice ceases to matter.

Girls in the study report photographing using camera phones and/or compact digital cameras, with the majority using camera phone as the main device for everyday snapshots. Sole ownership of the camera device appears of prime importance, and it is interesting to note that the way teenagers use cameras and how they define functionality may not follow the conventional divisions identified in studies based on adult participants. For participants with limited disposable allowance, it is not so much a matter of choosing which device to use, but rather making do with what is available for their sole use in everyday life moments. Most girls began by using family-owned digital cameras, but once they acquired their own camera phones they used this as the primary tool for taking photographs, as Millie explained in a matter-of-fact tone, 'camera phone

is more convenient'. Only those who own or have access to both devices can make a choice, based on the functional differences of image quality and handiness. However, this choice is not straightforward. There is always a trade-off between image quality and mobility. Some switch from camera phone to digital camera once they or their family can afford for them to own one for their sole use. They tend to carry the digital camera most of the time even though their camera phones are to hand. Many participants said they switched back to a camera phone because of its convenience. Although the quality of the images taken using a camera phone does not compare with those from single-purpose cameras, this does not reduce the personal meanings of the photographs. Camera phones were considered by some girls to be as good, or even preferable to single-purpose cameras on the basis of their convenience, portability and sole ownership. Camera phones are not reserved for capturing throwaway images, they are used in the same way as regular digital cameras, a trend observed by Ames and Naaman (2007). Similarly, digital cameras are used casually, to capture both the rare and the ephemeral.

Mixed use of these devices is noted by Tinkler (2008) who observes that even though studies of photography often centre on just one medium – the analogue camera, the digital camera, the webcam, the camera phone – users' actual practices include a range of camera technologies. For users, the distinction is not the different medium, but the different convenience: which photographic device that is to hand best suits the purpose. For example, Stella – who describes herself as a photography enthusiast – talked about taking her first photographs using a camera borrowed from a classmate, then switching to her camera phone, then to her personal digital camera and, since acquiring a polaroid camera, taking her digital and polaroid cameras as well as her phone, on outings with friends. She reserves the polaroid for very special moments with friends so they can watch the photographs develop and sign them; the digital camera gives her the freedom to document whatever, wherever, and whenever. She sometimes takes artistic black-and-white shots, and sometimes uses it to capture her family laughing together.

As discussed at the beginning of this section, the division between camera phone and digital/analogue camera use has led some scholars to argue that camera phone photographs and digital/analogue camera photographs convey different meanings. Riviere (2005) argues that camera phone photographs have a shorter 'life' than photos taken with single-use camera, and are not meant to be stored. Van Dijck (2008) argues that the value of camera phone photographs is not as 'mementoes', like the photographs taken with single-purpose cameras, but as 'moments'. However, I would argue that the new social use of personal photography does not diminish its traditional function as a memory tool. The value of a photograph should not be depreciated because it was not a purposely arranged shot, because the image quality is poor or the subject banal, or because it was taken using a medium not meant to be taken as seriously as the single-use camera. On the contrary, the mixed use of cameras has allowed more ways and more moments to reflect, reshape and relive our experiences. In interviews, none of the participants referred to photographs taken using camera phones as being of less value because of the medium. What matters is the story told by the photographs. A self-portrait that is snapped sneakily with camera phone during the compulsory siesta at school may be pixelated and of bad lighting, but it can be equally cherished and displayed in an online photo album because it freezes the 'that has been' (Barthes, 2000, p. 113) moment of resisting the structured time imposed by school.

While personal photographic practices such as self-portraiture are most often undertaken in private, it is far from a solitary activity. When asked why participants started using Wretch, four reasons recurred: peers (friends, everybody, classmates, online friends), sharing, self-expression, and memory work. Comments such as 'because almost everybody uses it, it seems that it's more convenient to use Wretch, and everyone will know, understand and use it more easily' (Milk) and 'because everyone uses it, I seem out-of-date if I don't use it' (Dee) demonstrate that the popularity of Wretch among peers is an important factor in the decision to have an online presence on Wretch, rather than on some other social networking site. A number of younger participants such as Pinpin, Sunny, Tia, Yaya and Yuan set up their Wretch accounts while at elementary school. However, Yaya is the only girl who had been posting photographs regularly,

mainly to share photographs from her dance performances and competitions. Other girls only use the blogs or Guestbook, and had only begun posting photographs to their Album after they had access to (home or borrowed) cameras, and when more friends had started sharing their photographs on Wretch.

Most participants' use of Wretch is not limited to the Album space. Wretch functions as an online album and as a personal home page that facilitates the sharing of all kind of content – textual, audio and visual, with the added benefit of connectivity with their peer world. It is 'a place where I can express myself and share things… mostly about school life and my boyfriend' (Aurelia), 'write blogs to share my life with friends or post about celebrities' (Cecia), 'Wretch is like a door leading everyone to my world' (Holly), 'I took some photographs but didn't know where to share [so I started using Wretch]' (Milk). These quotes show that girls' take-up of Wretch is largely motivated by social reasons, as noted in Stern's (2008) study of young people's personal homepage creation. Most girls opened their Wretch accounts when they moved to a new school, either middle school, high school or college. Entering a new social environment seems to prompt the establishment of an online presence on this popular social networking website, either to continue to participate in the social network at the previous school, or to start building a new network. For example, Rosie started using Yam/Sky Blog on moving to high school, but changed to Wretch when she went to college – because of its relative popularity. Pinpin (13), the youngest participant who was very keen on extending and consolidating her friendship network, puts in her blog sidebar a lot of applications or 'stickers' connecting to her own and her friends' online spaces. She started posting photographs and self-portraits on her Wretch Album as she entered middle school 'because the senior girls were all posting self-portraits on Wretch'. In fact, Pinpin admires the senior girls so much that, in the beginning of our interviews, she was only willing to give me links to those senior girls' Wretch Albums, but not her own 'because I'm too ugly, and my self-portraits are ugly too'.

The other phrases relating to individuality – self-expression and memory work– are important but less frequently cited reasons for using Wretch. Alison said she wanted

to 'record life process and photographs' through Wretch; Rosie said that '[I can] post some pictures, write some trashy posts; express myself, it's like wearing clothes, and it's really great to have this freedom of expression'. The advantage of posting content on Wretch or other digital media is that self-expression is automatically archived, and serves as a kind of memory work. Many participants said that what really mattered was their record of self, and that they did 'not care so much about what others think about the photographs'. In Chapter 6 I show that this is not strictly true in practice – impression management is important for deciding which self-portraits to share. However, it shows that at a conceptual level, Wretch is considered to be a space for collecting and communicating all things personal.

Wretch's significance is in being a photo-sharing site where memory can be collected and in acting as a personal online space that one can freely use. It enables a sense of control and a space for digital biographical work to be constructed. If Wretch were used only to showcase photographs, then when albums are 'past their shelf life', that is, have been displayed for a long enough time online, they would be deleted. However, many participants choose not to remove their albums, but to change the privacy setting so that older albums are hidden from public view while remaining in the space (even though their authors may seldom look at them). To the audience, a hidden album is the same as a deleted album: it cannot be seen; but the girls can maintain an affective relation with the albums and photographs. Deleting albums erases their place in girls' photo-worlds online (even though they might have offline copies), and erases visitor counts, an important digital footprint of the online album. For instance, Jie (15) has several hidden albums that contained photographs of outings with friends, and also some hidden albums that contained no photographs at all – she has removed the older photographs – but kept the albums as a 'shell' so next time when she adds more photographs to them, the visitor counts can be accumulated. This reluctance to remove albums or photographs that are not in use may be similar to what Slater (1995) described as the 'existential loss' we feel when we find old photographs have been destroyed or lost.

Interestingly, for a few girls (Mia, Faye and Rosie), their Wretch Albums are the only place their photographs are stored for a variety of reasons. Their mobile phones do not have enough storage space, their home computers are not always for their sole use, or they simply do not want to keep the photographs on the computer's hard disk for long. Although using Wretch as the sole data storage place may seem unwise, it underlines the importance for adolescents of having a private space which can be claimed as one's own, used freely, and shared with friends if desired.

In examining the reasons why participants use Wretch, we see that two tasks central to the construction of identity are conflated in the single act of online photo sharing. The self-oriented motivations correspond to the developmental needs of adolescents to construct a biographical project of the self through self-expression and reflexive contemplation of the past; the social-oriented motivations highlight the importance of being able to connect and communicate with peers (Donoso & Ribbens, 2010).

5.4 Crafting the Space: Album Characteristics

5.4.1 Content

Figure 11 Screenshot of a Wretch Album space

[This screenshot has been removed, as the copyright is owned by another organisation.]

Joining Wretch Album is free and requires no real-name registration. Figure 9 is a typical Wretch Album page displaying thumbnails of albums that are set for public (or limited public) viewing, album titles, total number of albums, number of 'items' in each album (photographs and audio and video files can be uploaded), the day's visitor numbers, and total visitor numbers. Albums are automatically organised in reverse chronological order, with older albums appearing in the bottom rows or on a next page if the Album contains more than 20 albums. On the top of page is a drop-down menu that shows a list of connected friends' albums. Users can design their own album backgrounds from a variety of stock backgrounds provided by Wretch and branded

sponsors, or to write their own CSS (Cascading Style Sheets) language– a creative opportunity valued by some participants allowing them to create an ambience that suits their style. At the top and bottom of the page are advertisements that cannot be edited out unless one is a paid user. Paid users can add music to their Album backgrounds by selecting from Wretch or uploading their own pieces of music. This feature was not widely exploited by the study participants, being used by only five girls (Yaya, Brandy, Jie, Layla, and Stella) who had added Mandarin pop music. This is partly because of the requirement to be a paid member, and partly because the addition of music can 'ruin' the ambience because of poor technical design – 'every time you click on an album, the music gets interrupted and starts from the beginning. I think it is quite noisy' (Lizzy).

Creating a new album requires the user to type in a title and select an 'album topic' from a drop-down menu. Selecting a topic allows Wretch to group albums belonging to the same topic under the same section on its front page index. Participants' album topics range from 'girl's self-portrait', 'school life', 'friends', 'special occasion', 'family', 'couple', 'photo diary', 'media entertainment', 'travel', 'pets', 'collectibles' and 'design work'. The number of publicly accessible albums belonging to study participants at the time of the interviews ranged from two (Jessica) to 84 (Milk), with the average between 10 and 20 albums. Albums with self-portrait as the cover image – usually to suggest the album collected self-portraits – ranged from one to nine (Milk), with an average of two to four albums per participant. Among album types, human subjects comprised the majority of photographic subjects with the most frequently pictured being friends – at school and during outings and self-portraits of friends. The overwhelming presence of peers in participants' albums shows that peer relations play a significant role in girls' visual constructions and representations of their life world.

Although photographs of friends are shared more frequently than photographs of/with boyfriends, almost all participants who were in a relationship at the time of interviews had posted photographs of their romantic partners on Wretch. However, the degree to which they highlight the relationship varied. Some participants were keen to advertise their relationship, so photographs of them as part of a couple were prominent

in their Albums (e.g. album titled 'Hubby I love you so much!'). A few used couple photographs as the album background. Other participants were more concerned about privacy and used implicit album titles such as 'hold hands and keep walking' so as not to attract too much attention. A few used a password to lock albums containing photographs of/with boyfriends or to keep the albums completely confidential.

Among human subjects captured by and shared in photographs, family members were the least prominent. At the time of the writing, around 10 participants had photographs with family members – generally a sister or brother, rather than a member of the older generation such as a parent or grandparent. The absence of family members and predominance of friends in young people's photographs was observed by Sharples, Davison, Thomas, and Rudman (2003) who examined photographs taken by 180 European children aged 7, 11 and 15. They found that at different ages children show interest in particular subjects: 7-year-olds tend to like photographing their toys, home environment and family; 11-year-olds are more interested in photographing the external environment, such as cityscapes; among the 15 age group, their social world was their main preoccupation. This absence of family members in photographs continues to college age. Mendelson and Papacharissi's (2011) study of college students' Facebook photo galleries finds that students are portrayed as 'suspended in sociality, perpetually bonding with friends and toasting the best of times' (p. 268).

In addition to posting photographs of self, friends and family members, many girls have albums dedicated to showcasing artefacts – ranging from handmade craftwork (Refi and Rosie), music or ringtones, photographs of celebrities or film stars, emoticons of SpongeBob, artistic images, screenshots of funny IM conversations with friends, and screenshots of record-breaking visitor numbers (Lizzy) or when one's album makes it onto Wretch's front page (Dana).

If we examine this subject matter in the context of the categorization outlined by Kindberg, Spasojevic, Fleck, and Sellen (2005), we see that almost all photographs serve affective-social or individual purposes and are in the categories of school life, friends,

family, self-portraits, photo diaries or 'collections'. Only a few albums serve a functional-individual purpose, and these are usually of items posted for sale online.

Finally, the organisation of photographs presents a clear structure of the type of narrative the participants want to tell about their lives. In the analogue age, photographs were organised mainly around events, such as birthday celebrations, or graduation ceremonies; however, digital photography means that photographs are as likely to be organised around 'ephemeral themes and collections' (Murray, 2008). Both types of organisation were observed in participants' Albums. Wretch encourages users to categorise their photographs according to a list of topics, in order to facilitate indexing and searching. Participants generally followed this principle of grouping photographs into albums by event. However, not all personal photographs can be defined by events or time, and there are grouped in albums by themes, rather than events or chronology. For example, Lucy had an album entitled 'gift' in which she posts photographs of cherished items received from friends and family. Angela (17) had an album called 'a feast of beauty' which contained miscellaneous photographs of beautiful subjects ranging from cute babies, the phenomenal Lady Gaga, and ballerinas to the Japanese star, Leah Dizon in semi-nude poses. Self-portraits are often organised around the theme of 'self'. They depict numerous types of occasions – shots taken in the subject's bedroom, with a best friend, on an outing, in the classroom, on a date with a boyfriend – making up a collection of images centred on the theme of self.

5.4.2 Style

Stylistic features are used to turn the generic Wretch Album space into 'my' space, as if using the bedroom walls to creatively display one's collection of cultural artifacts. Users personalize their spaces by creating new and (re)appropriating existing 'multimodal texts' (i.e. 'any text whose meanings are realized through more than one semiotic code', Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, p. 177). The technical options afforded to users to modify stylistic features include applying a background theme from a list of style templates. This is the easiest option. The templates range from commercial brand

images to more original images of the visual arts, landscapes and drawings. The 'design wizard' can be used to personalize the body (colour, position, font, etc.), banners, headers, and background images or to modify the CSS language to improve upon the background template, which requires quite advanced technical knowledge.

Most participants personalize their album background by selecting a background template from Wretch, or by using an uploaded image collected from elsewhere or a personal photograph. Some girls customize the background with an image of people or items they cherish. For example, Milk's Album background is a photograph of her mobile phone and a panda phone charm. Images of self were favourite backgrounds for seven of the girls who used self-portraits (or self-portraits with a girl friend/boyfriend) as their background images. Mia's (18) Album shows how a space can be personalized to demonstrate support from peers. She suffers from a rare disease and had to drop out of school for a year. She values time spent with school friends and her album background is a collage of 13 photos, including two of herself, a photograph of her ideal college, and the 10 group photographs of school friends. She explained that 'because whether my life is colourful is granted by them… some of them in the photographs have graduated, I was really close to them… It was all very simple and beautiful'. This photo collage helps to convey to her friends how much she values her embeddedness in her social circle at school, and her dream of being admitted to a top college.

References to popular culture are the most frequently used background images. For example, Pinpin, Vicky and Rosie respectively use the brand icons for Adidas, Playboy (the bunny) and Cartier jewellery as their background. Images of attractive celebrities – for example the Hollywood star Blake Lively, two bare-chested Korean male stars from the popular group 'Super Junior' and models – are also favourites for Eileen, Dee, Vivi, Chelsea and Alicia. Cartoon characters, such as Woody from Toy Story, Hello Kitty, Winnie-the-Pooh and Elmo from Sesame Street are also popular as Album backgrounds. Using popular cultural referents or brands to construct one's online space is frequent in young people's online profiles (Skaar, 2009; Willett, 2008) because their relationships with new media are informed by popular culture (Buckingham, 2007). Appropriating

these referents enables association of the self-image with the brand or culture without the need to own a branded item – what Schau and Gilly (2003) refers to as 'digital association'.

When asked to liken their Wretch Album to their own bedroom space and the kind of style or impression they would want to convey, most participants referred to the aesthetics of being 'clean', 'warm', 'comfortable', 'smooth to the eyes', 'pink' and 'cute'. Some girls have high expectations of their space: they want the ambience of this virtual bedroom to embody their personality and moods. For example, Cindy hoped visitors would feel 'a sense of joy and bliss, full of smiles', and deliberately selects photographs of smiling faces as her album covers. Jessica (16) described her album as under 'refurbishment' similar to the 'refurbishment' she is undergoing in preparation for her college entrance exam and her preoccupation with exams and revision. She planned to revamp her space after sitting the entrance exam and hoped to present a 'brand-new, I'm finally going to college' visual experience – adding quickly that, 'if I mess up then it will be a gloomy feeling'. In contrast, Yuan gave an enthusiastic account of her preferred style: 'I like simplistic background style, I don't like multi-coloured stuff', and said that '[if my Wretch Album were a room] of course, I want it to look colourful, presenting many different sides of me'. She had customized her album background to be a soft pink, behind a collage of six self-portraits in a variety of poses. Rosie, whose Album background was an image of giraffe, is a more complex case: she wants her visitors to have an impression of 'a funny, easy-going and look okay person', but sometimes likes kitschy backgrounds (such as her previous background Buddha, hinting at uneducated, poor and superstitious people) to convey an image of a 'life on the border of society'. However, she had also incorporated a Cartier jewellery advertisement because she 'likes red', and it reminds her of a 'wife with a rich husband' – a role that she claims to aspire to. These participants' accounts show that the Wretch Album space is seen as an extension of the self, communicating and matching their state of mind. Even in the case of Yuan and Rosie, their practices should not be interpreted as self-contradictory, but rather as honestly reflecting the many – sometimes conflicting – possibilities that girls have to cope with.

Among the girls whose efforts to construct their albums were especially creative, Stella (19) showed the most imagination in creating a multimodal 're-mix' of media forms and content. Her Album background was customized to show a dark, panther pattern, and was accompanied by a soft female vocalist. She has a total of 702 self-portraits taken using three photographic mediums – camera phone, webcam and digital camera. She appropriates existing representational tropes and improvises to produce the 702 portraits showing various poses, photograph compositions, tones and styles. One of her albums entitled 'WB' is a series of black and white self-portraits that look artistic and retro. In two other self-portrait albums, she has used photo-editing software to change the tone of the images, to write and to draw on the images so they look like a postcard design or an artistic music CD cover image. In some cases, she has drawn comic effects on her face. In one portrait, she has posed with her hand near her eyes as if holding a pair of glasses, then has imposed a pair of glasses drawn on the computer onto the portrait, so they fit perfectly with the hand position. In another non-portrait photo, she is posing with her friend in front of a painting of a chair on the wall, giving the visual effect of the pair sitting on the chair. What exists in physical form is cleverly integrated using her imagination and different modes of text. Like many other participants who take advantage of the technical facility to post personal music collections, Stella does so as well, but she went beyond simple re-posting by generating her own musical content: she has made her own recordings of herself singing popular songs in an album entitled 'pig singing'. Her mastery of a range of visual media, and her expertise in appropriating and re-mixing existing cultural materials in both visual and audio modes are perfect examples of how some tech-savvy youth can employ digital media and cultural references to articulate themselves using different media, in various modes in online spaces.

Although the degree to which participants 'collect' or 'elaborate on' existing cultural materials (Skaar, 2009) varies considerably, their tweaking of the visual and audio elements of their Albums provides opportunities to tailor their pages to express their idiosyncrasies, feelings and aspirations (e.g. via images of models and brands).

Perkel (2008) calls this 'remixing' practice, in which users 'blend text, images, videos, audio and games in the creation and maintenance' (p.9) of their social networking profiles, giving rise to new 'copy and paste' literacies that take place in online informal learning environments such as SNS. Participants acquire the technical skills to modify content and style settings on their own or through peer-mentoring, which involves challenges and experimentation. The experiences give the girls a sense of autonomy, satisfaction and achievement in being able to craft their spaces to match their vision. The process of learning and then managing the personal online space constitutes what boyd (2008) calls an 'initiation rite', whereby young people are socialised on the website. These continuous creative efforts generate 'social currency' (Greenhow & Robelia, 2009), including symbolic and social capital related to prestige, recognition and increased social connections. Moreover, this trial-and-error learning about self-presentation through media production, argues Weber and Mitchell (2008), is beneficial for the articulation of their multiple facets of youthful identities.

5.5   Self-Disclosure via Photographs

I have shown how participants engage in new literacy practices through the use and re-mix of multimodal, mostly visual, texts and codes. This new literacy practice online is aimed at communicating – about oneself to an audience who constitutes the 'social'. In this section, I show how personal photographs – especially but not limited to self-portraits – are used as self-disclosure in participants' interpersonal relationships.

While SNS facilitate social connections online, they are usually highly integrated with participants' offline networks (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007). Section 5.4 showed that sociality and self-disclosure, or being able to communicate visually about oneself to peers, are two main reasons why participants share personal photographs on Wretch. As Valkenburg, Sumter and Peter's (2011) study shows, the degree of self-disclosure, both offline and online (in IM conversations) escalates for boys and girls as they enter puberty, which is a time of tremendous physical and emotional changes. Self-disclosure online is popular among teenagers because the online environment is

perceived as being 'safer', allowing even the shyest and most self-conscious to connect with peers without feeling inhibited. In the next section, I conceptualise self-portraiture as an act of self-disclosure and examine how it serves as a means to communicate visually with specific relational partners and also a non-directed audience.

5.5.1 Social validation

In adolescents' experimentation and exploration of different aspects of self, feedback is important to validate their thoughts and actions. Buhrmester and Prager (1995) argue that social validation is important for gauging whether one is accepted and approved of by others (social approval), and whether one is 'normal' compared to others (self-evaluation). The reason why children will disclose more to peers than to parents in early adolescence, is because the horizontal structure of friendship makes peers ideal and important 'points of reference' for self-worth and acceptance (p. 32). Adolescents who are particularly insecure and unsure of others' perceptions of their self are likely to seek feedback from peers to provide reassurance and to encourage social relations (Miura & Yamashita, 2007). Taking self-portraits is a way of presenting themselves - out there in the social, and representing themselves through images that allow the audience to evaluate physical appearance, style and performance as well as internal qualities, such as character and personality, embodied and enacted by the subject.

In online self-portraiture, social validation is achieved in various ways: through visitor counts, comments left on the Wretch Guestbook, and comments provided directly to participants in private conversations. Visitor counts represent non-differentiating validation because they show that the Wretch space or particular album has received a certain number of clicks, but gives no indication of why the audience was attracted – whether due to liking (the preferred validation), out of curiosity or simply stumbling upon the space while browsing. However, a high visitor count is generally assumed to indicate interest, attention and popularity, validating the worth of the self-portraits and, by association, of the subject. Most girls admitted to paying attention to visitor counts in their early Wretch using days, but gradually lost interest in them for judging their

popularity. Early in their online presence they are keen to connect with peers, to gain recognition and to gauge audience reaction to their online self-presentation. Once they become more certain about the value of Wretch through prolonged usage, the non-differentiating visitor counts cease to bear much meaning.

Some participants had decided that the purpose of self-portraiture was to share and communicate with a small circle of friends, in which case visitor counts did not matter. For example, Mia talked of 'feeling relieved' because she no longer was concerned about visitor counts: She once assumed that a low count, such as 50 visitors a day, was an indication that people no longer liked her. However, once she realised that the personal significance of Wretch was that it constituted a diary, and she was writing to and for herself– the most important audience – and to a small group of friends, she valued qualitative validations rather than quantitative visitor counts. Daphne (17) emphasised that 'my photographs are for my own memory, I don't quite care how many people have viewed them'. However, she admitted that were her album to make it into the popular album list on the Wretch home page, she would be pleased. Lizzy (18) concurred that 'I feel that when my album is on Wretch popularity list, it means my album is very unique, and it gives me great confidence'. This suggests that, among those girls who do not actively seek quantitative validation, occasionally being considered popular is a confidence booster.

Another kind of social validation comes from comments from friends and unknown visitors. Contrary to my assumption, participants do not often exchange opinions on self-portraits with friends; if they do, the comments are usually benign. It is not usual for girls to receive comments on photographs from unknown visitors, but the few comments that have been received are generally positive (cases of Dana, Lizzy, Milk, Faye). This overwhelmingly positive feedback was also observed by Donoso and Ribbens (2010) in their study of adolescents' use of Fotolog, where they argue that it may be due to the strategic presentation of an idealized self.

5.5.2 Social control

In deciding when to disclose how much private information and to whom, the girls are exercising strategic control over their social image, and hoping to elicit the desired social response. This focus on self-presentational concerns is akin to Goffman's (1959) impression management. In the practice of online self-portraiture, teenagers have to make several decisions about what aspects of self they want to present, how personal or intimate their self-portraits should be, what styles of representation to employ, how long the self-portraits will remain in their Wretch space, and who should be allowed to access them. Being the photographer allows ultimate control over the self-image, which is especially important for adolescents who have heightened concerns about their body image, which is often a source of insecurity.

Daphne spoke of how much she appreciated self-portraiture after experience of modelling for amateur photographers: 'I realised how much I preferred self-portraiture because I can control the camera angle, and I feel more at ease. When others point their camera at me, I feel quite uncomfortable'. The control applies not just to the self-image, but also to the type of content shared, the communication channel and personal privacy. Having control of these elements allows the messages disclosed to certain audiences to be tailored, in turn allowing control over social relationships. Back in middle school, Daphne's friends saw her taking self-portraits and teased her 'as if you think you're good-looking', and Daphne has since kept those self-portraits in a locked album titled 'the embarrassing past' so her (current) friends would not see her past look, which she was not confident about. On the contrary, Huei does not mind making any of her albums public, but she likes to lock all albums with passwords, so when friends ask for the password, she can 'play hard to get' and jokingly ask for a drink in exchange. In this way, she ensures that the social interactions on her Wretch space are under her control. Ling is a slightly different case. As a girl who felt unconfident about the pre-college self who did not know about makeup, she locks albums selectively although she does not mind sharing, because 'it looks as if I have some secrets, that I am not so transparent'. Her decision to self-disclose selectively projects an image of 'a girl with stories' so that she appears more complex and more interesting to her peers.

5.5.3 Self-clarification

Self-disclosure also enables self-clarification because it is a motivation to ponder fundamental self-related questions such as 'Who am I', which Erikson (1968) suggests teenagers explore in the 'moratorium' period. In communicating personal thoughts, feelings and experiences to others, one is engaging in formulating, organising, reflecting, revising and reordering various strands of thinking to allow them to be articulated clearly. This reflexive awareness helps towards a deeper understanding and clarification, which, in turn, contributes to the construction of a series of coherent biographical narratives about the self which are crucial to the 'reflexive project of the self' (Giddens, 1991).

In the visual self-disclosure practice of self-portraiture, taking photographs of the self from various angles, showing different expressions and poses allows one to explore the self and literally to see oneself from other angles. Stella explained this in some detail:

> self-portraiture is addicting... When I notice that I look different in self-portraits, I want to continue taking more photos....The everyday me can only be seen by other people, I don't particularly think anything when I look at myself...but when I look at the self-portraits, I realise I can also be so pretty in photos!

Stella's account illustrates that when she self-portrays, she discovers different aspects of herself, and sees herself from a third-person perspective, allowing her subjective self (how she feels from the inside) to merge with her objective self (how others see her from the outside) enabling a clearer understanding of what she actually looks like.

In portraying the self, one does more than create a self-image. Suler (2007, p. 11) describes it as follows: 'the process of creating the self-portrait might be an unconscious attempt to draw that underlying aspect of self to a higher level of awareness'. In presenting and representing the self, one is simultaneously engaged in the effort of giving shape/form to the dynamic, emerging aspects of identity (Suler, 2009) making it clearer to the self and others what one is. Moreover, in viewing, editing, captioning and commenting on originally random photographs, they are made 'un-random' (Son, 2009,

p. 177) through organisation in photo albums, and titles. What the photographs mean to the self-as-photographer becomes clearer. Over time, one can see how internal dynamics evolve and change as they are embodied in every detail of the self-portrait. Aurelia and Lizzy talked about how they cherished self-portraits for the memories of changes in different life stages, allowing them to look back and see a clear trajectory of the self.

5.5.4 Self-expression

Emotional release

Buhrmester and Prager (1995, p. 38) offer a narrow definition of self-expression as 'an emotional or cathartic release of pent-up feelings'. It is particularly important for adolescents to have opportunities and space to communicate their intense emotions as they explore different roles, manage physical changes, navigate a web of relationships with family, peers and romantic partners, and resolve inner conflicts (Erikson, 1968). In Stern's (2002) study of teenage girls' writing on personal homepages, she found that homepages are like 'sounding boards' that serve cathartic and therapeutic functions allowing release of intense emotion. One participant in the present study, Mia, used writing online as a 'cure'. Mia's life is restricted due to her illness and strict family discipline. For example, if she goes out with friends, her family reprimands her for spending money that could go towards her tuition fees. She regularly posts blogs about her feelings, her experience of battling her illness, and time with friends. She says 'the me in Wretch is the most real me', although her family have read some of her blogs and commented that 'the way she writes about herself in Wretch is not the same as the her in reality', which Mia finds hurtful.

Making self-portraits – or any personal illustrations such as writing, can be use of self-expression, both because of the control over camera or keyboard and, as Suler (2009) argues, because image-creation can be therapeutic because it is 'a process of self-insight, emotional catharsis, the working through of conflicts, and the affirmation of identity' (p. 341), and sharing photographs online is an act of 'making the intrapersonal interpersonal' (p. 341). Daphne was the only participant to talk about using self-portraits as cathartic

release, perhaps because doing so could reveal deeper feeling and vulnerability, although Daphne managed to use self-portraiture in this way without appearing vulnerable. She likes to self-portray when she feels unhappy. Having to pose and smile for the camera forces her to 'appear joyful', and repeatedly doing so is a cathartic experience because her negative emotions are released in the act. On the other hand, Milk (18), who is reserved in her everyday social life, talked at length about self-portraiture as a way of expressing suppressed emotions and the diverse sides of her that are not revealed in her day to day interactions with people other than close friends:

> …[Self-portraiture] is a kind of self-expression and self-introduction…. Because it's new, fun, and unique….I can do a lot of facial expressions...and use eyes to express my emotions. Usually I'm like…expressionless=horrible, cold-blooded; smile faintly=no eyes, eyes narrowed; angry= glare at people…I don't like it, and don't feel comfortable, can't relax…can't fully express what I want to say…Self-portraiture is kind of like a vent for facial expressions…I'd make those faces that people don't usually see.

From these three girls' accounts, we see that cameras and Wretch constitute private spaces that allow intimate revelations and relations with an unspecified audience. Although Daphne and Milk did not talk about these expressions as directed toward a specific relational partner, the camera and the Wretch space seem to function as a silent audience whose simple presence permits the girls to release pent-up emotions in the self-therapeutic experience of photography.

Status update

Self-portraiture is used as another kind of self-expression, with a clearer communicative motivation in relation to the expected audience. The adage 'a picture is worth a thousand words' is one of the main reasons why people share personal photographs online – to provide a visual statement of who they are and a rapid update of recent events, actions, thoughts and status. On MySpace accounts, Greenhow and Robelia (2009) found that photographs were the most frequent 'status updates' for the teenagers. Although, as Baym (2010) notes, a picture update is not a two-way communication 'simply having access to one another's updates on an SNS may facilitate a sense of connection' (p. 135).

Many participants referred to 'sharing self-portraits and personal photographs as status updates for peers' as the reason why they had first decided to use Wretch. Millie (18) said that, for the Wretch Album was 'just to let friends see how I'm doing recently'. Lizzy also imagined her main audience as friends, and said 'it's my Wretch, of course I post my self-portraits, and to show my lifeworld… On the one hand, I document my changes; on the other hand, I want to share with others, haha'. Most girls include the URL of their most recent Wretch album (or blog post) on their IM status, so that friends will realise there is an update and can visit with a single click. Some participants, such as Alicia, Millie and Yaya, change the album cover image or album title whenever there is an update. This is a signal to the audience and gives the girls the feeling that their album is 'refreshed', giving it a longer 'shelf-life' on Wretch. Faye (18) updates her status very frequently and takes new pictures on a weekly basis – she talked about 'a feeling [of it being] compulsory' to see the 'NEW' icon blinking in the album (the 'NEW' icon disappears after seven days of album inactivity).

Changes to album titles are also used as status update to express different feelings and thoughts even when the photographs remain the same. For example, Holly (16) changes her album title almost daily, examples being from 'avocado milk', to 'the horoscope always shatters my heart', to 'I look forward to, look forward to', with the album titles sometimes matching her IM status messages. Dee (17) also changes her album titles 'almost all the time'. On the day of the interview, her self-portrait album was titled 'big head monster', which she explained as being 'because on that day my head appeared very big in self-portraits'.

Updating or lack of updating activity may be used to gauge the responsiveness of audiences or relational partners. Holly said the meaning of her Wretch is 'to let everyone know what I'm up to, that I'm fine.' Once she closed down her Album and Blog and immediately a friend sent an IM to ask if she was in a bad mood. Qian (19) also referred to frequent updating in the past, allowing her to see how much attention her friends were paying her. She had become 'too lazy' to post self-portraits on Wretch because her friends were mostly using BBS. This 'laziness' highlights the social nature of online

photo sharing: girls are more willing to invest effort in maintaining their Wretch presence if it is apparent that it is beneficial for relationships with friends. Miura and Yamashita (2007), in their study of bloggers, found that once closer relationships with audiences were established, bloggers could identify clearly their 'social existence', and were more likely to continue sharing.

5.5.5 Relationship development

Revealing intimate or sensitive information about self helps to foster new and close relationships because it promotes intimacy with relational partners (Greene, Delerga & Mathews, 2006). While personal self-disclosure provides information about the self, relational self-disclosure concerns the state of one's relationship with someone else, and 'how they are communicating and interacting with [the other]' (Delerga, Metts, Petronio, & Margulis, 1993, p. 5). Self-portraiture can be 'meta-communication' with relational partners and also the wider audience, about the closeness of the relationships.

Sense of belonging

There are several functional ways that personal photographs, such as self-portraits, can cultivate a sense of belonging among relational partners. For example, personal photographs but not intimate photos, posted on Wretch Album, are meant to be shared - with a vaguely conceived group of audience. Some, considered 'more private' photographs may be reserved to a smaller audience of friends through privacy settings that reflect 'gradations of intimacy' (Livingstone, 2008). The act of including certain people, but not others, in the 'trust circle' is a gesture marking the boundary to the relationship, making some people insiders and others outsiders. Another way of securing close relationships is by taking joint self-portraits. Tinkler (2008) argues that the act of taking a photograph is a means of establishing a connection, much as parents photograph their children creating the 'family unit'. This was observed in several cases. For example, Jessica has only two albums on her Wretch –her self-portrait album and an album of self-portraits taken with her best friend, Huei, entitled 'the pair'. Lizzy also declared that self-portraiture had become a hobby for both her and her friends:

I take with close girl friends, and afterwards we discuss what angle and outfit best suit me. Posting our self-portraits feels like we are very good friends, ha! And we can also document our time together as a shared memory.

Dee has an album entitled 'it's so good to be able to love you', in which she posts self-portraits taken with her boyfriend. She said 'we want to document every moment together, the way we are so happy and content'. These three cases show that taking photographs together is seen as strengthening internal feelings of bonding. In Zwier, Araujo, Boukes and Willemsen's (2011) study of Facebook, participants reported having higher perceptions of their 'hoped-for level of social connectedness' (p. 571) if they displayed profile pictures taken with friends.

Some participants not only post self-portraits taken with friends, they also collect and post friends' self-portraits. This exchange and reciprocal display of self-portraits on each other's Wretch Albums is an articulation and performance of the sense of belonging. Lizzy said that 'I only exchange self-portraits with good friends; for friends who are not close I'd tell them to just go to my Wretch Album = ='.[39] Finding that a friend has posted one's photograph is an indication of one's importance to the person (van House, Davis, Ames, Finn, & Viswanathan, 2005), because the friend has taken the time to upload the picture and used space for its inclusion in her Wretch Album.

There were many such examples among participants. For example, Holly started self-portraiture because her older girl friends wanted to have portraits of Holly, 'because we were close friends'. Holly has an album called 'I miss you a lot', in which she posts self-portraits of her 'sister' who, because of their different timetables, she cannot meet up with very often. They had known each other for about five years, and both have occupied space in each other's Wretch Albums since that time. Similarly, Jie (15) regularly exchanges self-portraits with her cousin, who is her best friend. Sometimes they exchange files when they meet in person, sometimes she tells her cousin that she is posting new photographs to prompt her cousin to send her some self-portraits. At the time of writing, her album contained an impressive 199 self-portraits. Yuan had an

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[39] = = is an emoticon expressing speechlessness in the face of a nonsensical situation or comment.

album entitled 'the beauties are all here' that collects self-portraits of her beautiful friends, and another album entitled 'Don't know why, I just really like her' that has a collection of self-portraits of one girl who she described thus: 'I think she's really cute, and we're quite a good match!'

We can understand this reciprocal exchange of self-portraits in the context of Marcel Mauss's (1925, p. 10) gift exchange theory, which argues that:

> This bond created by things is in fact a bond between persons, since the thing itself is a person or pertains to a person. Hence it follows that to give something is to give a part of oneself . . . while to receive something is to receive a part of someone's spiritual essence.

Mauss's observation fits with the case of self-portraits, which are physical objects embodying the person who is the giver. Through the act of exchanging personal photographs, such as self-portraits, these girls confirm and further reinforce their bonds with one another; the public display of friends' self-portraits – or as Donath and boyd (2004) describe it 'public displays of connection' – is also a symbolic gesture announcing the friendship bond to the broader social circle. Also, perhaps, 'one is known by the company that one keeps' and displaying connection may be an indirect way of establishing one's identity, or verifying 'face' on SNS (Papacharissi, 2009). In Yuan's case, collecting the 'really cute' girl's self-portraits in one separate album may be an act delineating the degree of closeness of their friendship, but it may also be her way of identifying and associating herself with the girl, thus indirectly establishing Yuan's belonging also to the beautiful clique.

Shared memory

As discussed earlier, Bourdieu (1990a) perceives photography as 'a technology for the reiteration of the party...It is experienced as it will later be looked at, and the good moment will look even better for being revealed to itself as a "good memory" by the photograph' (pp. 26-7). This applies to girls' albums that often show them engaging in mundane activities with no obvious theme or purpose. In some cases, taking the photo is the activity that generates fun and laughter for the girls. Despite their lack of aesthetic or archival purpose, these photographs carry important messages; when posted online, the

joy of the moment is both prolonged and repeated. The photographs serve the affective-social purpose of enhancing mutual experience; their subsequent viewing and exchange, and commenting on them, is collective memory work through which the joy of the 'party' is then replayed. Huei said that she likes to take photographs of friends 'in every stage'. 'In the first year, there was a choral competition, and we all photographed ourselves. In the second year there was the camping trip, we photographed us being cooperative. In the third year, we photographed one another looking delicate and pretty'. Huei 'hides' older albums with friends, rather than removing them completely, explaining 'because I might want to reopen these albums in the future. For memory, we can all be reminiscing together'.

There are times also when an interesting event is not experienced co-presently with friends, and online albums are used to share the experience with absent others, creating a sense of 'connected presence' enabled by mediated communication (Licoppe, 2004) or 'intimate, visual co-presence' (Ito, 2005) which image-texting enables. It allows continuation in a friendship that otherwise might become disconnected. Jessica talks of sharing photographs on Wretch so her middle school friends can feel that 'there is no distance between them...so in the future when we see one another, we don't run out of topics to say'. The sense of belonging to the same clique is preserved and carried on. Yuan has an album entitled 'I really want to share this, come take a look please~' that collects images of fun things in her life. One is a screenshot of her IM contact window that shows both her and her girl friend's status message as 'if possible, please let me orgasm!' with the caption, added by her, 'horny women'. Their IM conversation became so hilarious that she wanted to record it and share it with other friends who were not part of the conversation. Collections of images like this serve an affective-social purpose allowing friends who were not present to be updated about her experience, through this shared archive. Baym (2010) finds that using SNS to connect with already close friends allows people to further 'exchange bonding resources, such as affection, advice, and support' (p. 136), which are important for maintaining relationships.

A few participants use their Albums to communicate memories of events with ex-romantic partners. For instance, Huei, whose communications with and about friends are usually jokey, has a self-portrait album with the melancholy title 'is the sky blue?' in which she posts self-portraits to commemorate her time with an ex-boyfriend. The title hints at what they enjoyed together – just watching the sky. She does not know whether he views her album now, but for her this self-contemplation serves the dual, almost imperceptible purpose of affective communication with the remote invisible someone. This is her private monologue expressing her feeling of breaking up with her ex, and also articulating her longing to reconnect with him. Another participant, Hailey (17), had an album entitled 'say the breakup you wanted to say' which collects all the photographs of her taken by her ex-girlfriend, and another one called 'colourful moments' showing photographs of them together. Hailey said she uses these albums and her blog to communicate with this girlfriend since she knows that she still checks the Wretch space despite the breakup. Stern's (2002) study produced similar findings, that girls used the personal homepage as a 'sounding board' to recount and work through the intense emotions they experience in romantic relationships.

5.6   Conclusion

This chapter focused on the photographic aspect of self-portraiture, and addressed how we might understand the appeal of self-portraiture from the perspective of self-disclosure – an act that has significance at the personal level (biographical identity work) and also the social level (communication in interpersonal relationships). The hands-on experience with cameras and the construction of the online Album space provide opportunities for self-expression and communication through multimodal texts, allowing the capture of even the most mundane experience and the sharing with peers in order to maintain a sense of connection. Through the stories and explanations that participants shared, and observation of their Wretch Album, we see that in the practice of self-portraiture online, the personal and the social coexist in a single frame, although one may be in the foreground and one in the background. Self-portraiture and photo sharing on Wretch appear to be practices over which girls can exercise control of their self-

image, privacy and social relations, and have agency and freedom in the ways they express themselves. The Wretch space is seen as a personal space or 'virtual bedroom' in which to store personal things. Such a space might be difficult to find in the physical world; also, part or all of it can be opened selectively, depending on the nature of the collections and the closeness of the relationship with the audience. Online sharing of sometimes very ordinary self-portraits and personal photographs is not a narcissistic act, but is about occupying a presence online, archiving aspects of the self, exercising control over self-work, reaching out to others, and staying connected with important others.

In Chapter 6, I examine the performance aspect of self-portraiture and understand it as a self-presentation to the public. I discuss the thoughts and strategies involved in managing one's self-image online, how self-understanding can be improved by 'playing' with these self-images, and how, in some cases, different facets of self in various contexts coexist in this personal space online and are addressed to a range of audiences.

Chapter 6 Self-Portraiture as Identity Work

6.1 Introduction

Self-portraiture has a long history. The reasons why self-portraits are produced, and the means of production have changed over time as the medium for portrayal and communications technologies developed. Three hundred years ago, in the 18th century, a girl desirous of a picture of herself needed either to be either talented enough to make a self-portrait or fortunate enough to be born into a household wealthy enough for the family to commission an artist to paint her portrait. She might have only one likeness taken in her life, and it would depict an ideal of her appearance and social standing, which would become known and remembered (Sontag, 1979). A hundred and fifty years ago, in the mid 19th century, if a girl waned a picture of herself she would have to go to the town's portrait studio, and dressed in her best outfit would pose stiffly, under bright sunlight, against an idealized background, according to the instructions of her parents and/or the photographer (Barthes, 2000). She would probably have more than one portrait taken during her life; they would be hung in the family home, and passed down to her children and grandchildren. In the mid 20th century, a girl wanting a picture of herself could appear to her mother who was responsible for taking domestic photographs. The girl would have some say in how she was dressed and how she wanted to be photographed. There would be several photographs of her and they would be put on display in the home and shown to relatives and family visitors. In 2012, if a girl wants a picture of herself it does not matter what time of the day it is, what she may be wearing, or whether or not she feels like posing; she needs only to take out her digital camera or camera phone, point it at herself, and voila, she has a self-portrait! She might have hundreds or even thousands of self-portraits saved on her computer, many of which her parents probably will not see, but most of which a whole world of friends and strangers online will view.

The popularity of self-portraiture has grown against this backdrop of changes in media technologies, which have transformed personal photographic practices and also what self-portraiture means to individuals. Contemporary ability to capture images

easily has changed our perceptions of what is worthy of being the subject of a photograph, and the everyday banality can be captured or aestheticized as a legitimate subject – a point discussed in Chapters 1 and 5. Digital photography has not only expanded the range of photographic subjects (Mendelson & Papacharissi, 2011), and also permitted the narrowing of the subject to just the self, a banal subject and yet most extraordinary subject. The personal photographic practice of self-portraiture has become a way to present oneself to an external audience and also to explore oneself. In short, it is practised as part of one's identity project.

While Chapter 5 focused on the social dimension, and explored the role of personal photographs in girls' interpersonal communication and social relations, Chapter 6 offers a close-up analysis of girls' self-portraiture practices, exploring the role of self-portraiture in their personal identity work, but without losing sight of the social cues that might be at play in their identity performance and projects. Specifically, this chapter addresses research sub-question 3: Why do girls practise self-portraiture? How do they balance the impression management of the ideal and the real? The chapter first explores girls' reasons for taking self-portraits, then discusses their practice of self-portraiture along the rubrics of self-presentation and self-exploration, each facilitating the exploration, construction and affirmation of personal identity.

6.2   Self-Portraiture. Why and when?

We look first look at Millie's (18) Wretch. Her Album space contains seven public albums. The album titled using her nickname collects her 196 self-portraits accumulated over time. Most have the same photographic composition, with Millie's head and upper body occupying most of the frame and the background obscured. It can be seen that several portraits are shot, one after the other, against the same background, with only slight variations in facial expressions or poses. Millie's album collecting her many self-portraits is not dissimilar to those of other participants interviewed, in that they showcase and emphasize the girls' faces in various moments in life.

So what is it in self-portraiture that girls enjoy so much? This is a question that bewilders those who do not take self-portraits, or who are reserved about sharing self-generated content publicly. Some girls take up self-portraiture for reasons similar to why people take photographs in the first place – to document life. For example, Aurelia (17) relished the opportunity that it allowed her to 'save a lot of memorable bits … and the changes in me in every different stage of life'. Yvonne (16) started self-portraiture at the age of 12 with the same purpose of keeping memory, although she grew tired of it after a year because it felt 'awkward and meaningless'. Some girls use self-portraiture particularly to keep a record of their positive or good-looking moments: Qian (19) said, 'when I feel that I'm particularly pretty today, like nice makeup, new hairstyle or good mood'; Similarly, Lizzy (18) said, 'I use self-portraiture to portray myself in pretty ways'. Cecia (18) only takes self-portraits every one or two months, and it's usually 'when I want to post a new blog entry about happy things to share, or when I buy new clothes'. Jie said straightforwardly that the meaning of self-portraiture to her is to 'record the best face'.

Related to using self-portraiture for positive self-presentation is the sense of control conferred by self-portraiture. Like Daphne's case discussed in Section 5.6.2, Yaya (16) also has some experiences doing modelling work for amateur photographers, and she talks philosophically about 'a sense of presence' in self-portraiture when compared with modelling for others, that 'things feel more real… I get a sense of achievement and happiness from taking a good photograph of myself'. She also agrees with Daphne that, because of the control over camera, self-portraits can sometimes look better than photographs taken by others, which is one reason why she enjoys it so much. Jo (16), a reticent girl, feels uneasy when taking photographs (including self-portraits) with others, and is the most comfortable when taking self-portraits on her own. As a result, her self-portraits are all taken in private in settings of her control – mostly against dark and blurred out backgrounds.

Girls also take self-portraits for more practical reasons: Bing (16) observes on the Wretch front page that albums with self-portraits usually have more visitors, and she

therefore takes self-portraits with the very hope 'to attract visitors to my Wretch space'. Jessica started taking self-portraits so her junior high school friends could be kept updated with her life. Yaya takes self-portraits in order to 'have a photograph to represent myself on my IM account'. Holly initially took self-portraits so that if friends wanted to exchange self-portraits, she had something to give. Stella takes self-portraits as self-exploration, 'to see multiple faces of myself'. However, self-portraiture does not necessarily start with a clear purpose. Alison (17) talks about taking self-portraits 'when I'm bored, when I feel like taking photos, when the condition is good, like good lighting or good mood'. Mia (18), who is disabled by a rare illness, takes self-portraits as a way to admire herself, 'Everyone is more or less narcissistic =///=[40] Even though I'm not quite mobile, I'm still quite confident about my face'. Milk (18) and Chelsea (18) both do it simply for the experience: 'because I was curious, because it's fun and unique' (Milk), and 'I don't know why, just like it, can't think of any specific reason' (Chelsea). These accounts show that girls engage in self-portraiture for an array of reasons ranging from individual, introspective use to social, outward-oriented use, sometimes with clear motivation and other times on the spur of the moment.

To learn more about the situational contexts of self-portraiture, I asked the girls 'What are some moments that prompt you to take self-portraits?' Their responses fall under the categories of leisure, self-presentation and self-expression/self-disclosure.

As already suggested by Alison's explanation, girls engage in self-portraiture to ease boredom or to actively *create* a pastime activity. For instance, Holly said 'I often take self-portraits during classes. When classes are so boring, I fall asleep if I don't find something to do… There are fewer self-portraits recently because I have been sleeping in classes :)'. Similarly, but more constructively, Yaya says, 'When I feel really exhausted halfway in my studying at night, I take self-portraits'. From these two accounts we can see a major appeal of self-portraiture is that it can readily transform dull moments – whether structured class time or disciplined study time – into a leisure moment, at least temporarily.

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[40]An emoticon that denotes embarrassment or shyness.

Another context in which self-portraiture takes place is, as mentioned earlier, at positive moments in life which one wishes to capture and present to others. These include being in a good mood, having good makeup, enjoying friends' company, or experiencing changes in life such as new clothes, new haircut or new purchases. As Huei puts it, 'I take self-portraits when I feel I'm quite good at this moment. Maybe I also want others to see the self-portraits and think I'm cute or so'. Dana (15), highly conscious of the value that society places on beauty, said, 'I self-portray so others would know about me. In this society, people all look at the appearance, if I don't put some pretty self-portraits [in my albums], no one would notice me'. Cecia, although she does not take self-portraits very often, said passionately, 'self-portraiture is girls' demonstration of confidence, and I hardheartedly refuse to accept any negative comments on my self-portraits!!'. These accounts show that girls use self-portraiture not just to record their good states, but also to present their best face to the world online, indicating the importance of impression management and the important presence of the social dimension for a practice that would seem private and individual.

The third situational context in which girls take self-portraits is when they actively wish to disclose or to express certain aspects of their selves. The ways in which girls utilise self-portraiture for these reasons are wide ranging. For instance, Daphne uses self-portraiture to cheer herself up, 'when I'm upset, I take a photo of myself smiling to remind me to be happy'; Huei (18) uses it to record memory-worthy little bits in life: 'I think it's something I can always keep memory with, sometimes it's not just about a focus on the self… sometimes it's keeping a memory of me and the beautiful background in back of me'; Rosie (19) thinks of it as the ultimate freedom of expression: 'self-portraiture is part of life. I can post some photos, post some meaningless articles, express myself, just like wearing clothes. And the freedom of expression is really great!'; Faye talks about how it contributes to positive self-esteem: 'self-portraiture is the source of self-esteem. Because you get good self-portraits, you become more confident'; Holly cherishes the spontaneity of self-expression: 'Anytime, when I think of it I click the button (of the camera)', and Milk uses it to indulge in a private moment of self-

admiration: 'sometimes when I come back from school I want to be narcissistic a bit. Like take some photos and look at myself in the mirror for a few minutes'.

Dominant in talking about the situational contexts that promote self-portraiture, is a sense of using self-portraiture as an instrument for self-presentation, whether for the purpose of musing about oneself, or sharing with others online. In representing oneself through photographs and subsequently presenting oneself online are both mediated identity work and, in the mediation process, there are ample opportunities to explore aspects of one's identity and ponder on 'the face to the world' (Cumming, 2009) that one wants to project online. The following section examines the range of meanings that the act of self-representation and self-presentation can have for participants.

6.3   Online Self-Presentation

Photographic practices can aid in identity work in three ways: to produce statements of identity, experiment with identities, and deconstruct identity (Tinkler, 2008). Self-portraiture serves as a photographic practice instrumental to these purposes. Looking at some of the self-portraits girls post, it may seem as if they are simply looking at themselves in the mirror, playing with different ways of being oneself – especially in the case of digital cameras or camera phones fitted with lens that can be rotated so one sees the finished 'look' as one presses the shutter button. But self-portraiture is more than a pursuit focusing on the self; as Woodward (2002, p. 79) puts it, it 'is the self made public'. The act entails an element of making oneself known to the public, an act of presenting oneself to the public. This 'public' need not be 'the public' in the conventional sense. It is an act of putting something internal about oneself out there to be viewed, including by the photographer herself.

The multiple roles one assumes in front of the camera lens are captured in Roland Barthes's (2000, pp 13-14) eloquent philosophical musing on portrait photography: 'I am at the same time: the one I think I am, the one I want others to think I am, the one the photographer thinks I am, and the one he makes use of to exhibit his art...I am neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object'. This convergence

of many roles in one is more complex in self-portraiture, where one is simultaneously the one I think I am (the actual self), the one I want others to think I am (the ideal or hoped for possible self), the one that actually appears in camera lens (which may be neither the actual self nor quite the ideal self), the one that will look photogenic in this particular situational context, and the one I can use to showcase myself to my audience online.

When self-portraits are shared online to an audience, considerations regarding self-presentation are further complicated and multiplied by the attributes of computer-mediated communication, which give individuals more control over the ways to present oneself, how much to disclose about oneself, and also whether to present a portrayal that is truthful to the physical, offline body (Gibbs, Ellison, & Heino, 2006). On the one hand, the relative anonymity, limited contextual cues and asynchronous communication afforded by the internet provide opportunities for selective and sometimes optimized self-presentation (Walther, 1996); on the other hand, the same anonymity may encourage people to be more uninhibited in their self-disclosure and presentation. The photographic dimension and the internet dimension intersect in self-portraiture, raising several questions about self-presentation online: Are self-portraits honest statements of identity? Are self-portraits more fantastical because they experiment with different facets of identity such as the ideal self, the playful self, etc.? Or do self-portraits depict a self that is totally different from the usual self? What these questions point to is not a concern for whether the self-portraiture reflects 'truthful' identity – not least because the physical body in everyday life may not always represent the most truthful self – but what these different ways of presenting, and representing oneself mean to the girls' identity work. After all, as Stern (2008, p. 106) finds, young people may not see the selves presented online as false, but rather as 'touched-up' selves, and the identity performance online is treated as 'an "as-if" exercise – a way of trying out new ways of being and attempting to incorporate their ideal selves into their actual selves'.

Self-portraiture communicates one's identity visually. Participants have a variety of views on what aspects of themselves they wish to present to others through self-portraits. Posting self-portraits is far from being a one-way communication – despite it

appearing to be one-way – since inevitably one imagines how one appears in the perspectives of the generalised other (Mead, 1934) and reflexively one constructs one's self-image based on the perceived perspectives of the audience. Recall Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical approach to impression management in social interaction, girls' Wretch album may be thought of as a 'front region' where the girl gives a performance about her life to a body of audience through a series of selected self-portraits. In deciding what aspects of her life to show, how she appears in the portraits and in which situational contexts, and with whom she wishes to be seen with by the audience, she is seeking to foster an impression of a particular self. Many of these decisions may be unconscious; some may give deeper consideration to their self-portraits (or personal albums on Wretch in general) than others. By asking questions such as 'what kind of impression do you want your audience to have about you', 'how do you select which self-portraits to post', we can learn about the various ways that identities are constructed and performed, and the role of self-portraiture in girls' identity work.

6.4   Impression Management: Between the Ideal and the Real

Studies of self-presentation on Facebook find that users may project socially desirable identities – 'the hoped-for possible selves' – in their profiles, the identities that are not the same as their 'true' or 'real selves' (Zhao, Grasmuck, & Martin, 2008, p. 1830). Where photographs are involved in online self-presentation such as online dating sites or young people's photo-sharing sites, studies show that 'good' physical appearance is important (Whitty, 2008; Gibbs, Ellison, & Heino, 2006; Siibak, 2009; Elm, 2009), and may be particularly important for teenage girls who are coping with physical changes and appreciate validation about how they look. In addition, because there are fewer 'gating obstacles' to online self-presentation, people can 'stretch the truth' about themselves a little bit, such as appearing more ideal and socially-desirable (Yurchisin, Watchravesringkan, & McCabe, 2005). The affordances offered by the internet and digital photography – lack of direct face-to-face interaction, capacity for carefully constructing, selecting and editing self-portraits – allow girls the opportunity to

present themselves in a likeable, physically attractive manner and, indeed, most girls are enthusiastic about such opportunity.

Yuki was the most outspoken about the uses of her self-portraits. When asked about why she posts self-portraits on Wretch, she responded – very confidently - with a question:

> 'simply put, do you notice that I'm very photogenic? It's rare to find photographs of me that don't look good. Actually putting self-portraits online serves one purpose: to let others know that I'm very pretty. This is what self-portraiture means to me'.

To her, self-portraiture is about appearance, and posting self-portraiture is used solely to gain recognition of her physical beauty. She went on to explain that 'for those that want to understand me as a person, they'd go read my blog posts', indicating that she segments her Wretch space clearly to showcase different aspects of her self (i.e. external appearance versus internal thoughts). Similar to Yuki, Rosie said, with much enthusiasm, 'Of course I want others to think I'm pretty when they see my self-portraits!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! […] If I don't think the self-portraits are pretty, I won't post them. I hope the visitors won't be terrified after clicking on the photo'. Her matter-of-fact language reveals an underlying assumption that beauty is a natural criterion used by people to judge self-portraits, particularly those of girls – this was also found in Siibak (2009) that girls are more likely than boys to emphasise the importance of beauty in photos.

Other girls talked also about creating a good impression of the self, but a specific kind of impression – a cute one. Huei, responding to the question about 'the style you like to present yourself', said, 'it may be cute style, I think. [...] Because if other people think I'm cute, then they have a good impression of me'. Dana also said that a cute look as opposed to the alternative of a more mature look, is the way to present herself as likeable, 'I use smile and pretend to be cute. I can't do mature look, because my face and dress style are not mature at all'. Along the same lines, Yaya agreed on the ideal impression, 'Oh, just cute and sweet, friendly. I'm really worried people might think I look distant'. She furthered explained the way to achieve this impression is 'Hmm..., looking cute, and make the eyes look bigger', as evidenced in her IM photo. She added, 'Everyone wants to look pretty. Besides, it's easier to attract visitors this way'. Alicia

(18) openly discussed the same 'trick' of appearing cute: 'In self-portraits, I tend to pretend to be cute a bit, but in reality I'm not like that. Also in self-portraits I open my eyes so widely on purpose, etc. In reality who would keep doing that?'

According to these girls, in self-portraits they like to keep the style of look in line with the actual self, but also accentuate ideal feminine attributes ('make the eyes look bigger', 'pretend to be cute a bit') in the photographs. And, for some participants, being able to portray or capture oneself in such positive light adds to one's self-confidence. These accounts highlight why the idealized look, showing the 'soft' feminine value of cuteness, sweetness and friendliness – what the content analysis in Chapter 4 reveals are the main ways most girls represent themselves – is important - for the social benefits of relationship development (i.e. making a good impression) and validation (i.e. attracting more visitors). Idealisation, as Goffman (1959, p. 45) writes, is part of the socialisation process; one's performance will 'tend to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of the society, more so, in fact, than does his behaviour as a whole'. Where physical beauty and softness and femininity are attributes valued highly in the society, participants prioritise them as the attributes they most want to emphasise about themselves.

While some girls think the ideal personal front is an accentuation of existing personal traits or persona, others regard the self-image projected in self-portraits as different from what they perceive to be the real self. For example, it is Brandy's (17) ideal to give the impression of being a 'classy' and smart girl in self-portraits, but admits that, 'I look very classy in the self-portraits, but I'm really not that classy'. She actually describes the everyday self as being 'idiotic, mad as a hatter'. Lucy (17) said that 'I want the audience to think that I'm pretty, but when they complement me, I have to be really modest'. When asked whether she perceived any differences between the selves in self-portraits and in everyday life, she responded readily that 'it feels like a different person, very different from what I look like in reality', and that self-portraiture is 'deceitful'

(zhàopiàn[41]) because of the makeup, strategies and props that one can employ to improve one's appearance in self-portraits. Milk, who also used the word 'deceitful' to describe self-portraits, shares this view. She said, 'when [the] audience comment on my self-portraits as looking good, cute, funny or dramatic, I always feel that self-portraits depict a different me. […] some people don't look good in reality, but look very good in self-portraits […] My friends all say I have "killer look" in self-portraits, and that I post on Wretch to deceive people'.

Another word used by girls to describe the perceived discrepancy between the self-portrayed and the actual self is 'real face'. For instance, Jessica, well aware of her facial blemish and chubby lower body, wrote in the initial questionnaire a seemingly bizarre statement, 'I don't quite show people my real face (zhēnmiànmù)' in self-portraits. In one interview, she explained that because self-portraiture allows her to 'strategically cover up the imperfect part of my physical appearance', she is able to use self-portraiture as a 'demonstration of confidence' despite the perceived lack of good appearance. Similarly, Mia elaborated that in order to achieve the 'Wow! So pretty!' impression:

> It takes multiple try. After all, I'm not born with the look, it's not possible to get pretty
> photo or a photo that touches me in the first go. I just takes a lot at first XD. Then I delete
> the bad photos afterwards... Actually, if you have the angle right, no matter how ugly you
> are you can be very pretty XD[42].

The above accounts show that not only can self-portraiture be employed to present an enhanced self-image, it can also be use strategically to bring out a self-image that one does not believe to be intrinsic to one's 'real' self. Why, then, when the girls are aware of the gap between the presented impression and the 'real' self to the extent that it feels like deceit, are they keen to convey a favourable image? It seems that underlying their accounts there is some sense of insecurity about who they 'really' are and that presenting an ideal image is not just about giving a good impression to the external

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[41]The word zhàopiàn means 'photograph' in Mandarin Chinese. In the interview, instead of typing the correct character of piàn, Lucy typed a homophone character which means 'to lie or to deceive' to suggest that photographs can lie.
[42] 'XD' is an emoticon that means 'cringing laughter'.

audience, but is also about having some kind of a 'mask' to protect the insecure and vulnerable self beneath the pretty face, behind the camera and computer screen.

To exercise more control over the current self-image, some participants talked about removing or hiding self-portraits taken in the past that they felt presented a different self-image. This is often connected to becoming more knowledgeable about the beauty culture, learning about makeup, for instance. Suddenly, there are options to enhance appearance, and their appearance is subjected to stricter self-scrutiny. This makes the girls careful to hide self-portraits from the past so as not to reveal 'the game' of a prior-to-transition self that might potentially reveal the 'actual' self and embarrass them. For instance, Mia described this realisation as: 'Back when I first started taking self-portraits, my face looked so huge in the photos! I even thought those were nice photos! Then, for some time, I always put make-up on before taking self-portraits'. Lucy expressed a similar view. She uses a password to 'lock' all self-portraits taken in junior high school, and it was not until she felt she had become more beautiful in high school did she 'dare' [her own words] to put self-portraits in a public album. Rosie adopts similar protection methods. Rosie had experienced harsh criticism about her appearance since childhood; she keeps the self-portraits taken before the double eyelids cosmetic surgery in several albums locked with passwords.

Ling is a telling example of how one's Wretch Album can house different stages of self, and also different ideas about self-image under one roof. She describes how her feelings about what self-portraiture is for, changed from fun pastime to public self-presentation, 'I use to take self-portraits because I thought it was fun or I just suddenly felt like it, but now I always wait until I'm satisfied with my look to take self-portrait... Back then I didn't know about skincare and cosmetics'. Her earlier attitude to self-portraiture was more spontaneous and individual-oriented – for the fun of it or when she was in the mood. However, after she went to university and became socialised about beauty culture via peers, she became acutely conscious of 'how her taste was poor' before, and now thinks more about her self-image, presented in self-portraits as well as in everyday life. As a result of this realisation and to protect her self-image, she hid from

public view the albums that collect her previous self-portraits– which she describes as 'the real me from the past to now'– and only makes public the self-portraits of 'the more satisfied self', referring to self-portraits taken after her socialisation into the beauty culture since entering university.

Finally, some girls are not comfortable sharing self-portraits that lack a social context. Refi (18) and Jiajia (17), who are good friends, both share self-portraits taken with friends, but prefer to keep individual self-portraits hidden from public view. Jiajia's public albums contain photographs about school life and gathering with girl friends, the self-portraits taken on her own are all put in an album titled 'Keep out' with a batman sign as album cover. According to her, these self-portraits taken in her privacy were of a variety of facial expressions – cute, cool, ugly, funny, etc., and she does not share these because 'my look is not pretty enough to make *good* self-portraits [my emphasis]'. To Jiajia, it is not that she is unconfident about her appearance, but that in her mind, self-portraits without a social context need to meet a higher standard of beauty, which she does not meet. Her friend Refi takes even more private measures – she makes the album invisible on Wretch Album so she is the only person who can see it. She feels that: 'it's weird for others to keep looking at my self-portrait, it's awkward and embarrassing. […] I don't really want people to see them'. She elaborated:

> I'm not sure if I will publicize my self-portraits in the future, because I think I'm not very suitable for this genre compared with other people. Like some girls in my class are photogenic without much effort, but I am not, so it always takes me a while to take self-portraits.

For both girls, it may be that presentations of the self, alone, without other friends, in self-portraits, removes them from their social context, which acts as a buffer between the self and the audience, and they are put under public scrutiny in a highly personal and isolated context. The gaze of the audience ('keep looking at my self-portraits') becomes too penetrating, provoking feelings of self-consciousness and unease, therefore, the self-portraits without social contexts or sociality are kept from public eyes – as another way to shield oneself.

6.5   Identity Experimentation and Exploration: Self-Portraiture as Play

Play enables the exploration of that tissue boundary between fantasy and reality, between the real and the imagined, between the self and the other. In play we have a license to explore, both our selves and our society. In play we investigate culture, but we also create it (Silverstone, 1999, p. 64).

The word 'self-portraiture' in Mandarin is usually used as a verb. When used as a noun, the accompanying verb is frequently the word 'play', so the act of self-portraiture is described as 'to play self-portraiture' (wánzìpāi). It is not a linguistic coincidence that 'play' is preferred to other verbs such as 'do' (zuò), because the act of self-portraiture entails an element of play. The participants often talked about self-portraiture as playing – playing with many faces and poses that could be conjured up, using random objects as props, with friends, using different camera angles and special effects and editing software, and producing a self-image that might be fantastical or actual. Play allows one to imagine two possibilities, what Bloustien (2003, p. 30) calls 'serious play', for what could 'possibly...conceivably be real', and 'fantasy play' for what 'could not be real – moments of exaggeration or mimetic excess': both types are important for constituting the self. Through play one gains 'a feel for the game' (Bourdieu, 1990b), and tests the possibility of what potentially could be real, as well as what is better left to the fantasy world.

Self-portraiture can be practised simply for its fun. For instance, Tia said 'I like to play ... I like to make faces ... Sometimes I'm very silly, in self-portraits I imitate the emoticons on Yahoo IM'. In Chelsea's Album, there is an album entitled 'The flower series' which contains 45 self-portraits with a simple object – a flower - shot in continuous sequence, each picture showing a different facial expression and 'interaction' with the flower. When asked how she could think of so many variations for poses, she responded that she was 'just being natural'. Although her response does not directly address the question about her inspiration for the poses, it nonetheless suggests that self-portraiture is natural, following a spur of the moment, and that she was playing with the flower rather than deliberately posing. Lizzy also uses random objects to turn self-portraiture into a monologue performance with gimmicks. Her album titled 'change

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change change' contains self-portraits post edited to project all kinds of special effects. In another album entitled 'I can go home directly after school' she takes self-portraits with all kinds of objects. and in various poses. She explained that:

> Sometimes I get ideas from other's albums, sometimes I just do random poses, sometimes I use the props around me or whatever I have with me. Whatever is available I'll make use of it, haha! Besides, if there's no gimmick, just the same pose and expression is very dull, no one wants to see self-portraits like that.

Dee, a vivacious girl with expressive body language perhaps because of her background in performing dance, also uses self-portraiture as play. At the time of the interview, her Wretch Album conveyed an impression of a lively person, with albums entitled 'big head monster', 'cartoon life', 'OHOH!! Very thick heavy makeup', and album covers showing her making faces - from the deliberately ugly to the classic 'girl next door', smiley and friendly, to 'funny face' shots that have been contorted using editing software. Explaining this diversity, she said:

> I like to self-portray with a big smile. It's also very pretty just giving a faint smile. Hahaha this sounds so narcissistic hahahaha...Sometimes I want to make goofy faces, because I feel that everyone takes pretty self-portraits online; since I'm not particularly stunning, I may as well take some ugly photos, it's not a bad thing to make people laugh.

Such play is not only performed in privacy, it can take place in public with friends. The camera gives girls a 'licence' to experiment and to play, so that 'what might usually take place in total privacy as "serious fantasy" or "serious play"' can be converted into a 'pubic carnivalesque performance' (Bloustien, 2003, p. 89). A popular way to engage in such play is by taking ugly photographs (chǒu zhào), which come up in a number of girls' discussions. Cindy's (17) case is illuminating. Pictures taken of her on her own are ugly self-portraits taken as play to break out of the dullness of everyday life and to contradict the stereotypical feminine image. Pictures taken with close friends are often also ugly self-portraits: 'we seldom have serious photos together'. Jie and Layla are the same. Jie (15) said that when she is with friends they like to portray themselves making ugly/funny faces 'because we are bored XD'. She would then post these self-portraits in an album that only those in her 'friends' circle' on Wretch can access. Layla (16) said

quite straightforwardly that: 'today I went out with friends, the photos we took were completely idiotic, the facial expression and poses were retarded'. When asked why, she said, 'because we think every photo has the same facial expression, we thought we'd do something different :) '. Thus, it would appear that performing 'silly' exaggerated play together in public is a way for these girls to do friendship work.

These seemingly playful self-portraits can facilitate self-experimentation and exploration. During her interview, Dee added that in her self-portraits, in addition to 'playing goofy, looking merry and pretty', she also wants to 'give a mature look', 'because everyone says I'm very childish. Also I'd like to try "playing" with other styles'. Her account reveals that self-portraiture is not only considered a practice for fantastical playing of exaggerated personas, but also as something through which she could actively explore, experiment with and even rehearse a hoped for self that is possibly more mature, a self that is different from how she is usually seen by others.

Note that this desire for a more mature look was not unique to Dee, it was shared by other girls. For instance, when Aurelia was asked about the style or feeling she would like to convey with self-portraits, she said, 'I don't know... I just learn from other people. Haha, maybe mature style, or a different kind of me', and she actually felt that 'sometimes the photographed me is different in some ways. For example, the skin is more fair, or you can't see pimples on my face'. The younger participant Bing (14) takes delight in being mistaken in real life for a high school student, and in her self-portrait she likes to employ the angle that 'covers up my round face so my jaw looks pointier… and I look more mature'. Huei had also tried to present herself in mature ways, although she failed. She explains, 'when I see other's mature look I think it's so pretty, but when I try it [to look more mature] I'm not at all satisfied with my own look. I can't escape from the usual cute style. So I give up, haha!' Behind these girls' attempts to look older than their actual age is the desire to shed the current image of childlike girlishness and to appear slightly more grown-up, a motif that is unique to the adolescent transitional experience.

For example, some girls use self-portraiture in an attempt to bring out an aspect of the self that has not yet been physically embodied. Vicky (18) expressed a yearning to see another side of her: she usually presents herself in pretty, cute and sometimes sexy ways, but she is also interested in trying out the cool, punk style. She said, 'it's a pity I don't have the outfits ... Because I'm curious, I don't know what I'll look like in those styles'. And Lizzy said, joyously: 'I can pretend to be cute, or mature. There are so many varieties, self-portraiture is very fun!' We can thus approach the explorative self-portraiture as a space of fantasy, which Bloustien (2003, p. 117) defines as 'an aspect of reality where, in the form of serious play, it can represent activities where the "unspeakable" is "spoken"'. That is, instead of seeing the self-portraits as representing themselves, we can think of them as a space where girls fantasize about not only about ideal selves, but also possible selves, imaginary impossible selves, and put in foreground the generally hidden or unspeakable desires to be more mature, glamorous, sexy, goofy, dramatic, cool, etc. These selves may be 'unspeakable' due to appearance, conflict of personas, or strict adult supervision. Those desires to be someone else are thus 'spoken' and experienced in self-portraits without real commitment to the desires, risks or potential consequences, if any.

This capacity for self-portraiture to facilitate playing with the boundaries to a variety of personas and between the real and imaginary is captured in Mia's comment on the different relations boys and girls have with self-portraiture,

> [...] Also guys actually don't like to do self-portraiture ... For the plain-looking kind, they wouldn't want to take self-portraits. Even if they do, they wouldn't show it to other people.
> [...] Whereas the handsome kind is always handsome however they take the self-portraits.

When I asked if she thought this applied to girls, she said, 'no, not really. Girls like to "play" self-portraiture. [...] With good angle, even the most ugly can be very pretty'. Her direct comment highlights an important perceived gender difference in approaches to appearance: boys do not play self-portraiture because there is not much to play with about their appearance; boys do not wear makeup, and they are not interested in spending time making faces or finding the best camera angle. While her observation is overstated and overgeneralised, it does point to how the societal value placed on girls' appearance make self-portraiture an ideal 'game' for girls to play with appearances,

because, with the aid of imaging technology, beauty and fashion, there is so much to play with. Moreover, girls' appearance can – is even expected to - undergo endless transformations. This is a theme that is further explored in Chapter 7.

Yuki is reflexive about her self-portraiture and, when asked about the impression she wanted to convey, talked candidly and at length about how she uses self-portraits to present and represent a self that has many different sides:

> It depends on the photos. For sexy photos, I hope people would let out a sigh of amazement like "wow, this girl is so pretty! So gorgeous!" For cute photos, I hope people will smile. For goofy photos, I hope they will laugh… For those that are more expressionless, I hope they just see without commenting. For innocent-looking photos, I hope people don't want to hit me after they see them.

She went on to explain the reason why she adopts so many different styles:

> Because every photo has a story behind. […] Sometimes from the photos you can guess the mood and story behind at that time. Although some photos are topic-less, people can interpret it the way the want to. If I want others to know what I was thinking at that time, I'd caption it. Although I think …it limits people's imagination when they see my self-portraits.

Here we see that, despite her earlier statement that self-portraiture is simply to 'let others know I'm very pretty', there is another layer of reason for this practice – to let different styles of self-portraiture tell different stories for her, of feelings, memory and thoughts. In short, the self-portraits are embodiments of her changing state of mind.

Ling has a slightly different take on self-portraiture. To her, it is less about engaging with her inner self, and more about exploring the gap in perspectives between 'me' and 'others'. She likes self-portraiture because 'it looks different from looking at yourself in the mirror. You can keep taking and taking, until you are satisfied with it… Looking at the photos is more like looking at myself from others' point of view'. She often takes self-portraits after she has finished putting on her makeup, 'to see how it looks overall'. Having a mirror to examine the finished look is obviously not enough for her because it is still looking from one's own perspectives. Only when the viewing is mediated through the camera lens – giving a third person perspective – does she feel that it shows how she looks from others' perspectives. This is perfectly encapsulated by

Woodward (2002, p. 97): 'the self-portrait goes beyond the mirror. It is not a reflection of the self returned only to the self: it is the self made public'. Another girl, Alicia, said she takes self-portraits with a mirror in the back of the camera, 'so she can see how she looks like in the camera view finder'. Both girls' accounts show that, despite self-portraiture being practised largely individually, the camera lens facilitates a looking-glass self (Cooley, 1902/1964), it adds a third eye, entails an element of 'others', 'public', and allowing the subject to imagine herself in social interactions or relations even if alone. Self-portraiture, therefore, puts the individual and the social in a single frame. It encourages self-understanding as well as reflexivity, and can be considered simultaneously a conversation with the self, and (to recall Goffman's dramaturgical metaphor), a monologue performed to an audience of 'generalised others'.

While play is often understood as a trivial activity, there is nothing trivial about self-portraiture. There is a huge amount of effort put into making a satisfying self-portrait – such as applying makeup, finding the optimal lighting and angle, going through multiple trial-and-error. Self-portraiture is play that requires serious engagement before one gains mastery, despite the appearance of spontaneity and light-heartedness. So what does this play mean for girls and their making sense of themselves? Play activities, although they may seem unorganised, are a form of identity work (Kehily, 2007). Understanding it within a social context, we can see play as 'getting a feel for the game' (Bloustien, 2003, p. 117), and that it is 'more about accommodation, an embodied evaluation of where the individual feels she can comfortably "accept" or negotiate the "rules of the game", rather than subversion of the ground rules'. Thus, girls are not attempting to create a radically different self-image in self-portraiture, rather this pastime activity can be understood as their testing out the boundaries to various possible selves and to various aspects of her identities – social identity, personal identity, gender identity. When with friends, girls as a group may wish to project a particular feminine image by emphasizing sisterhood and girlishness, or collectively to challenge the stereotypical gender image by playing goofy. When alone, girls may fantasize about an alternative self-image, and explore the possibilities with the camera. This alternative self-image may be the hyper-feminine, cute or sexy, the androgynous cool, the gender-

neutral comic or funny, or a mixture of all. The act of self-portraiture thus becomes what Hills (2002) describes as the 'playful potential' for 'movement across boundaries of "inner" and "outer", "real" and "fantasy"' (p. 61).

6.6   Exposing the Backstage: Appearing Authentic

While portrait painting and photography traditionally have been used to 'embellish or idealize the subject' (Sontag, 1979, p. 105), they are used also to provide a candid portrayal of the subject in an authentic setting. In Sections 6.2 to 6.4, I explored how self-portraiture is used by girls to construct, explore and manage self-images, from the ideal to the fantastical. But self-portraiture is also about presenting who one is, the 'authentic' self. In some cases, when self-portraits appear too contrived, or the girls 'try too hard' to look good in the photos, they want to balance out the 'idealisation' with some 'realness' of the self. One strategy, described in Goffman's terms, is to expose the 'back stage' of self-portraiture through acts that appear inconsistent with the perfectly posed self-portraits, as a way to assure the audience of the subject's authenticity. These acts involve behaviours that are out-of-character with the front-stage persona, and reveal the preparation work of the character, or show scenes that reveal the constructed nature of the front stage.

The playful self-portraits discussed in Section 6.5 may be one strategy to reveal one's real personality. Tia described the 'huge difference' between the portrayed self and everyday self as, 'everyone who sees my Wretch keeps asking and says I'm pretty and sexy [in self-portraits], but when they really know me, they feel that I'm very childish, not as mature as the photos look'. She has mixed feelings about this gap. On the one hand 'it's very cool, feels like different people', yet the drawback is that 'some people have high expectation of my appearance [after seeing the self-portraits], but I might let them down [in person]'. So, admitting that she is 'bothered' by this expectation-disappointment gap, she said she took the 'play funny' self-portraits to portray a self that is closer to her everyday personality. Tia also has an album captioned 'I tell you I'm a girl of classy disposition you don't believe it', which presents her as more demure. She said her friends can 'absolutely not' believe that those were the real

her, 'probably because I am usually very hyper'. Tia's case reveals an interesting conflict of impressions: those who know her online are surprised by her actual lively personality, whereas those who know her offline do not believe that she has a classy side. However, both selves are separate aspects of her self-identity. In order to give the 'right' impression about herself, she takes funny self-portraits – an out-of-character behaviour for the *online* pretty and sexy persona – to reveal her offline childish character, and takes classy self-portraits – an out-of-character behaviour for the *offline* hyper persona – to show that she is also a classy girl, despite her usual image.

Similarly, Lucy has a self-portrait where she posed as a classy girl, but rather unexpectedly the photograph caption says 'eat shit', a vulgar expression that conveys a completely opposite message to the impression the photograph conveys. Lucy explained it thus: 'haha, because me being like this [classy] is very phony. I'm just not this type of person. I'm the type that is dumb dumb and doesn't care about my self-image. Haha!' This explanation shows that while girls may desire to present an impression that conforms to ideal femininity, they may feel uneasy about presenting themselves in ways that are not true to their personalities, hence, Lucy balances her over-the-top poised look by the foul language of the title, a trait that is more authentic. Dee, who is in a dance specialty class and performs regularly wearing heavy makeup, posts self-portraits of her without makeup, or–as she describes it – in 'play ugly' (bàn chǒu) self-portraits. She explains it as, 'probably because the makeup is too heavy and too thick, then I start acting goofy'.

While out-of-character behaviours could be an aspect of impression management, aimed at establishing authenticity of the character, not every participant is comfortable with publicizing out-of-character behaviour manifested in play goofy or ugly self-portraits. Some girls prefer to keep these photographs in password-protected albums, which allows the general audience to infer from the album cover or title that the album is revealing the playful self. Only close friends have access to this 'real' self. This strategy serves two purposes: it presents one's self as authentic or genuine, but allows the girls to retain the overall impression of an ideal self; and, as discussed in Chapter 5, it

contributes to friendship work by marking the boundary to 'who is allowed to enter my real world'.

Another way to establish authenticity is by revealing the constructed nature of the front-stage, commonly achieved by exposing the backstage 'bare look' (i.e. without makeup). For instance, Lucy said the best self-portraits are 'all those when I wear makeup', yet the self-portraits that best represent the *real* her are 'the photos without makeup…, especially the photos taken at school'. In other words, the everyday, ordinary context is the one that best defines her, in a realistic manner. Similarly, Milk makes sure she always has a self-portrait album of the bare look, 'so I can let people know my real look'. Interestingly, Milk, and another girl Minnie, who claim to present the 'real' self in self-portraits, title their albums or photos using self-denigrating descriptions so that the audience can 'mind the gap' between the photogenic self and the 'real' self. For instance, Minnie's only self-portrait album is entitled 'Danger' because 'my appearance is horrid and I want to warn people…of my face being not so okay', whereas Milk calls her self-portrait albums 'long hair monster' and 'no compensation for [your] life if [you] get scared to death'.

On the one hand, the act of playing ugly or showing the bare look –the opposite to appearing pretty or wearing makeup– can be interpreted as an attempt to reveal the real and subvert the beauty standard, which ruptures the constructed illusion of femininity actualised through repetitive performances of what constitutes normative femininity (Butler, 1990), as manifest in many self-portraits. However, another interpretation is that those who have shown themselves to be the 'can do' or pretty girls can afford to share ugly photos publicly. If, as Skeggs (2001b) argues, femininity is an achievement, an investment, and a form of cultural capital, then clearly it is only those who already possess the capital that can afford to challenge it openly, otherwise, one has to acknowledge their contra-normative act as apologetic, as in the cases of Milk and Minnie. We revisit this theme in Chapter 7.

6.7 Changing and Growing Up

Over time self-portraits serve as an archive documenting the changes in appearances, styles, skills, practices and meanings of self-portraiture to the subjects over time. To some girls, such as Yuan, Millie, Lizzy, Daphne, and Qian, the changes they observe and celebrate are 'becoming a more mature girl/woman', reflected most notably by appearance and stylistic changes. Millie talked about her self-portraits 'have become more eye-pleasing. I look more mature than before, and my techniques for self-portraiture have improved as well'. Rosie talked about a gradually more relaxed attitude toward self-portraiture. She now presents herself in more natural way, rather than being so insistent on looking pretty with false eyelashes and good makeup. This change in attitude toward her self-image may also signify her acceptance of the self as who she is, rather than a possibly beautiful person.

Milk speaks movingly of every self-portrait as 'having a life, a feeling…that reminds me of my self and thought at that time'. She elaborates:

> I used to be an ugly-duckling, very unconfident… so I had my hair dyed and perm at the age
> of 13, hoping to cast off the old self… at the same time I became rebellious…but it is from
> these changes that I gradually establish confidence and courage… to become tough.
> Afterwards, I need to change myself bit by bit, and then look back at the old self to know
> what I was like…

To her, the meaning of self-portraiture has changed: it is not simply about presenting superficial changes in appearance, but is about documenting and reflecting the psychological changes she went through at different stages of her life and, ultimately, is about presenting a 'mature, becoming more feminine' self 'so people don't have to worry about me'. She has deleted the albums from her 'rebellious period', and has posted an album entitled 'I strive to become mature', which includes self-portraits of her at home, wearing a skirt. The skirt is not just a sign of maturity, it is also an announcement to friends that she has finally recovered from a traumatic experience – sexual harassment in her childhood by strange old men – which made her resist wearing anything feminine. The purpose of posting these self-portraits and making them public is 'so my friends won't force me to go shopping in skirts with them'. Posting self-portraits

on her Wretch Album allows her to negotiate between a demonstration of normative femininity and remaining physically in her own space, which is safe and secure from possible physical harassment.

Qian also uses self-portraits to reflect on the phases that she has gone through. Her albums are neatly organised and titled according to age: '17 very awkward', '18 very cute', 'not cute'[43], each tells a story of how she experienced that age. She said, at seventeen, 'it felt very awkward. It seemed like I was an adult, but still couldn't vote. And I was still like a kid to my parents'. At 18, 'actually I don't like to be thought of as cute, but because I'm short, I was always called cute. And then I felt maybe I am really of the cute style'. After18, 'my clothes became more mature, and hairstyle was changed. I wanted to be looked at as mature, haha'. The albums serve as a diary and document the changes from childish cuteness to adult maturity.

While self-portraits posted and archived in Wretch Album could visibly represent one's changes, the absence of updating activity in Album, which remain as if frozen in time, may be equally significant. Aurelia has not updated her Album for some time, which she explained was because she was undergoing a period of change, and has high hopes that when she gets around to update her Album, after her college entrance exam, it will 'express a whole new changed self'. She said that:

> I want to change to be different from the past, not just appearance, but personality. I want to change... I'm too fat, haha, the face is too big.... I want to become an empathetic person.

This quote is dominated by an eagerness to transform herself, to be different in many aspects. The emptiness and quietness of her Wretch Album reflects her state of being 'under refurbishment'; as Stewart (2003, p. 780) argues that the body is 'a statement of self, […] and reshaping it is undertaken within the larger enterprise of restructuring the self'.

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[43] To ensure anonymity, the album titles provided here have been modified to ensure that a search using these words will not lead to identification of the actual albums.

Some participants talked about their relations to the self-portraiture practice changing from initial enthusiasm to casual or even lackluster interest after some years of intensive engagement. Faye described how she used to be passionate about self-portraiture:

> I used to turn on the night lamp just to take self-portraits, even when it was 2am! Now I don't do that. Now I only take some photos before I go out, haha! ... I always feel I used to love self-portraiture more, now I'm probably too lazy.

Her interest waned because she had taken so many self-portraits in the past. Similarly, Jessica said her enthusiasm faded over time because of the 'lack of meaning' in self-portraits:

> Now I feel a photo needs to have memory value, such as with a friend whom I seldom see, or memorable scene. Like the self-portraits in my mobile, perhaps photo 1 to 10 are all taken at the same time at the same place, just different facial expressions.

The initial attraction of self-portraiture, of capturing and sharing the mundaneness and the self, dissipates and is replaced by a new attitude to self-portraiture and its meaning.

Ling's (19) declining interest in self-portraiture, particularly in posting self-portraits online, was for other reasons. After six years of self-portraiture:

> Now I just view self-portraits in my computer. Sometimes I'm even too lazy to upload to computer. I just delete them straightaway. Got tired of it. I felt that it's just always the same.

Although she still takes self-portraits occasionally, having an audience or not has ceased to matter so much. Recall her earlier reflection on self-portraiture as allowing her to see herself from others' perspectives; perhaps the camera still serves as a generalised other for her to explore and confirm the self-image, whereas the sociality facilitated by self-portraits has become less important.

6.8   Managing Multiple Contexts and Audience

Throughout this chapter, we have seen that participants' self-presentation is multi-faceted, reflecting different aspects of the self – the actual, the fantastical, the ideal – at various phases in life. The diversity (or versatility) of self-images existing in one space

is due partly to the exploratory nature of the self-portraiture practice and partly to the affordances offered by Wretch Album which facilitates compartmentalisation of space, thus allowing multiple social contexts to be created and to coexist in one's Wretch Album.

One characteristic of social media, according to Marwick and boyd (2011), is that multiple social contexts collapse into one on their platforms. For example, parents, close friends, school acquaintances, and love interests all type in the same URL and are directed to the same Wretch Album. Users have to negotiate among different audience expectations and the different faces they may want to project to each different audience group. In other words, if, as Goffman proposes, different social interactions require an individual to perform a different 'front', take on different roles for different groups of audience in order to foster a convincing impression of the part one is playing, then social media make this task challenging because it is difficult to segregate audiences. Although at the time of the self-portraiture, most girls do not think beyond 'what makes a good self-portrait' and to consider the specific audience, in organizing the Album space, questions of audience and contexts determine which self-portraits are shared, in which albums, under which privacy settings. One way to address this collapsed context is by making use of the website's architectural foundation (Papacharissi, 2009), to partition the space so that some aspects of self are public while others are 'publicly private' (Lange, 2007). The partitioning can be achieved by explicitly organizing photographs intended for different audiences in different albums, with various privacy settings. It may be achieved more implicitly by the girls' own ideas of their imagined audiences and presentation of a self that speaks in their 'language', although such distinctions may not be governed by controlling access.

We can conceptualise self-presentation on several levels (see Table 21), each corresponding to a different context and different audience. The first level – the lowest generic level – presents the girl in her offline everyday life context versus the online album context. The main difference between these two contexts is that, in the offline everyday life one may have some control over the impression one 'gives', but less over

the unintended impression given off, through non-verbal behaviours, for example; in the online Album, as in the case of other computer-mediated communication, one can select the personal photographs that are posted in order to construct a particular impression or optimized self-presentation, to avoid the unintended impression. Therefore, the self in the everyday offline context can be seen as the backstage self compared to the front-of-stage self presented in the online space.

The second level – which is slightly narrower – presents the girls in their Wretch albums, and is the self in everyday photographs versus the self in self-portraits. The former, although already a refined self-presentation when compared to the everyday offline self, has stronger cues and richer background information to understand the girls as situated in their offline social context (such as school life, leisure activities, friends) than do self-portraits. In self-portraits, the cues are minimal and the background scanty – in part because an arm's-length face-shot cannot capture much of the background, and in part because the photographs are taken in a context created by oneself, such as at one's desk, on a bus or in the bathroom. In this sense, the impression of oneself in self-portraits (front stage) may be more controlled and carefully crafted compared to life photos posted online (back stage).

The third and highest layer presents the girls in self-portraits, and is the fantastical or idealized self versus the more 'real' self. The fantastical or idealized self, as if enacting a persona, is front stage compared to the more natural self, more in line with 'what I really look like' 'backstage'. An example is the self idealized with makeup or posing as classy, versus a self that is bare faced, or appears very playful as in everyday life.

Table 21 Girls in multiple contexts

	Girls in everyday life	**Girls in Wretch Album**	**Girls in self-portrait**
Front stage	Selective presentation of self and life on Wretch album	Selected aspects of self, in a context solely created by oneself (e.g. Self-portraits, photos with significant others)	Idealized self
Back stage	Whatever one is like in everyday life	Selected presentation of self, but within an everyday context	'Authentic/real' self

On each level, girls may imagine different groups of audiences. But these audiences are imagined not to allow the audience's preferences to be catered to, but to allow the girls to decide who they are comfortable with or willing to show this side of the self. Each level takes the girl deeper in the conversation with the audience and with themselves. The first layer speaks to the most general audience such as acquaintances and unknown web users, and is the 'lowest-common denominator' (Marwick & boyd, 2011) and least private photographic information revealed about oneself; the second layer speaks to a more intimate audience, such as friends and families, and may contain some private information, hence the imagined audience for front stage will be smaller and more intimate. At this level, those girls more concerned about privacy will impose limits on the front stage audience by setting passwords for the albums. The third layer may not always be present because not all girls consciously conceive a distinction between the fantastical or idealized selves and the real selves. However, where it does exist, girls may be imagining an even smaller audience: only a very few are allowed to see one side of the self, but not the other. For instance, the unconfident girl may prefer to present only an idealized self-image; however, if this is considered to be narcissistic, she may present only the natural, modest self.

Take Milk's account in Chapter 5 of what self-portraiture means to her. She said that:

> […] Usually I'm like…expressionless=horrible, cold-blooded; smile faintly=no eyes, eyes
> narrowed; angry= glare at people…I don't like it, and don't feel comfortable, can't

relax…can't fully express what I want to say…Self-portraiture is kind of like a vent for facial expressions…I'd make those faces that people don't usually see.

It appears that for her there are four kinds of self: in everyday life, there is her front-stage self which is a more reserved self who cannot be more expressive, and her back-stage with close friends which is the expressive self; in the self-portraits posted online, there is the front-stage self which is the expressive, pretty self, and a back-stage self that is ordinary-looking but still expressive. She did not talk about these selves being either more real or unreal than others, because they are all part of the self that comes to the foreground in different contexts with different 'audience': they are all her 'identities-in-action' (Weber and Mitchell, 2008).

From this point of view, we can conceptualise self-portraiture as a performance within a performance, in which one performs a monologue that may or may not adopt a different performative style from the main performance. For some, the self in self-portraits is a carefully managed self-performance that projects their best face, for others, self-portraits merely provide another way to tell one's story, so being and/or appearing authentic and natural is paramount. As Papacharissi (2009, p. 201) writes, the settings and 'props' of the site architecture 'facilitate multiplicity, showing audiences the many "faces" of one's identity and simultaneously negotiating and presenting identity to a variety of audiences'.

In crafting self-portraiture and controlling access based on the connections girls forge with different groups of audience, girls do not experience loss of pure privacy, but only 'connected privacy' (Kitzmann, 2004, p. 91), which 'does not negate or eradicate moments of pure privacy, not does it subject everyone to constant surveillance', but is more accommodating to users' needs allowing 'the walls [to] be dropped at any moment without necessarily leading to feelings of violation, exhibitionism, or disempowerment' (p. 91). What is important in connected privacy is not so much the structural power of surveillance, but to what degree and under what circumstances individuals can exercise agency to control' (boyd, 2011, p. 506).

Goffman's metaphor of front stage and back stage, is particularly important here because when these two constitute the (performing) space for play that facilitates girls' exploration of aspects of self, presentation to multiple groups of audiences, while preserving different levels of privacy and, through the (imagined) responses of audiences to develop a digital looking glass self. In this sense, the space is 'created and negotiated as a fundamental aspect of self-making' (Bloustien, 2003, p. 179). In this space girls '[push] the boundaries just so far but not further... [play] at the borders of these values' (p. 133). In her project, Bloustein observes that 'certain spaces can be constituted as private within areas usually designated as public – the inclusive thus becoming exclusive' (p. 179). While she is referring here to physical space, it is equally clear how participants in this study turn the inclusive public into the exclusive private to suit the need to carve out a space of their own, whether in the sense of private albums, or appropriating the public space through self-portraiture, and make it a private context for themselves.

6.9 Conclusion

In this chapter, we explored the ways in which participants practise self-portraiture, in order to learn about how it contributes to their personal identity work. We started from the simple question – why do girls take self-portraits, which led to discussion of their specific preferences for impression management. Self-portraiture was analysed through the concept of 'play' to investigate how the seemingly trivial act of play with a camera actually facilitates self-experimentation and exploration, which are fundamental to the construction of identity. We looked also at how girls use and relate to self-portraiture and how the relationship with self-portraiture changes as they get older. Finally, we examined how the technological affordance offered by Wretch allows girls to manage different facets of the self in correspondence with different contexts of self-presentation.

Self-portraiture is considered by some participants to be a leisure activity that need not have a purpose, by others as a way to share (especially positive) aspects of the self

with others, and by yet others as a way to capture and express every passing thought and whim. While the act of taking self-portraits may take place mostly in private, once posted online these self-portraits become a public act of self-presentation, which inevitably requires some consideration about how one wishes to be seen by others. Many participants talked about the importance of presenting a pretty face so as to leave a good impression and be acknowledged by visitors. However, some participants thought they were presenting merely an enhanced self-image while others felt they were presenting a self-image that was not 'real' or intrinsic to them. The ways that participants may conjure up a self-image which they do not believe to be inherent include playing with the many possible self-presentations, each of which embodies a possible self or a purely fantastical self. It is through this exploitation of the camera and engagement with the self that participants develop a deeper understanding of 'who I am' and 'who I aspire to become', whether the images are 'possible' selves, and 'how do I appear in the eyes of others'. However, it should be remembered that self-portraiture is not just about presenting a good appearance, for some, it is important also to ensure that the 'real' or authentic self is present in one's Wretch space. Therefore, Wretch Albums can collect various 'faces' or aspects of the self from several time-periods, each intended for a different group of audiences. Thus, participants who are more concerned about privacy, may choose to use privacy settings, or simply to compartmentalize their Album space to distinguish the self that appears in different contexts, directed toward different social relations.

From participants' accounts of their self-portraiture practices, emerges an overarching sense of changes or variations – in the 'faces' they put forward, in their personalities, in the stages of their lives, in their aesthetic standards, in their social relations with friends or dating partners, in their attitudes toward self-portraiture, and in the ways they use Wretch Album. Self-portraiture, as an individual practice, and Wretch Album, as a personal space, are what facilitate these young girls to gain control, autonomy and flexibility in self-learning, exploration and identity construction. Although the general practice of self-portraiture and girls' favoured self-presentation strategies do take place in a larger cultural context and reflect the dominant cultural

expectations made of girls – these are further discussed in Chapter 7 and Section 8.2.4, their space on Wretch is still a relative free space that they can claim as own to test the boundaries and gain a clearer sense of who they are comfortable being.

In the following Chapter 7 the focus shifts from self-identity to another equally important ways of defining self – gender identity. This last empirical chapter examines how some participants perform particularly gendered versions of self-portraiture, by posing in ways that are stereotypically feminine. It explores what these emphasised femininities might mean to girls in their processes of forming a gender identity, allowing a more complete picture of the role of self-portraiture in social relations (Chapter 5), personal identity (this chapter), and gender identity (Chapter 7).

Chapter 7 Self-Portraiture, Femininity and Embodied Identity

7.1   Introduction

The uneasy relationship that feminist scholars have with women's practices related to their bodies, beauty, and ideals of femininity resemble girls' uneasy relationships with their appearance, beauty practices and femininity. It is here that the analytical and critical scholarly lens fails to grasp and understand the often ambiguous, contradictory lived experiences of girls and women (Davis, 1991), resulting in a feminist language that alienates those it seeks to speak out for. This part of the research is situated in the debates on agency, power, beauty culture, representation, and hopes and fears regarding girls, culture and media. This chapter explores how gendered self-presentations and representations are constructed, maintained and sometimes challenged in self-portraiture, and the norms that girls adopt or not in creating self-images. It investigates how the possibilities of being a girl are limited or extended in online self-portraiture.

Chapter 6 examined participants' self-portraiture from the perspective of impression management and exploration of identity through self-presentation work. Chapter 7 explores participants' ideas and – in some cases – ideals about self-presentation in relation to femininity, focusing specifically on the representational styles of cute and 'sexy', popular among participant girls and viewers of girls' self-portraits posted on Wretch. They show the way cute and sexy femininities are represented as natural, innate qualities for some, and adopted representations for others, yet seen as almost compulsory for femininity. Section 7.2 revisits Butler's gender performativity (discussed in the conceptual framework in section 2.3), which is used as an analytical tool in the examination of girls' presentation and representation of femininities in section 7.3 and 7.4. Section 7.5 studies participants' thoughts about beauty practices for self-portraiture and what they reveal about girls' ideas of ideal femininity.

7.2   Gender Demonstrated by the Body

Butler's central thesis in her theory about performativity is that gender is not something we are endowed with, but something we perform, through 'conformity with recognizable standards of gender intelligibility' (Butler, 1990, p. 22) which make one an 'intelligible' subject. These standards of gender intelligibility are dependent upon the 'heterosexual matrix', which Butler uses to describe that which 'designate[s] that grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders and desires are naturalized' (p. 151)[44]. Gender, therefore, is the 'repeated stylization of the body' (p.45), which operates according to the logic of the heterosexual matrix that establishes itself as unquestionably natural.

For Butler (1995, p. 134), a performative act 'brings into being or enacts that which it names and so marks the constitutive or productive power of discourse'. For a performative act to bring something into being or to enact something, it must cite or re-signify 'the historicity of those conventions in a present act' (p. 134), for the power of the performative comes only from 'historically sedimented linguistic conventions' (Butler, 1995, p. 134). Putting this in the context of self-portraiture, when girls enact the conventional body language of femininity, they are not adopting a single act, gesture or pose, but invoking meanings conventionally associated with these acts – what Nayak and Kehily (2008) called 'performative tropes' – which are entrenched in the heterosexual matrix. These render them intelligible subjects, that is, 'proper' female subjects defined according to the discourse about ideal femininity.

As discussed in Chapter 2, Butler does not think of gender construction as a subject's deliberatively exercising power to perform a single act or freely choosing which gender to enact. Rather, she proposes that in the repeated acting out of gender norms it is 'a process of reiteration by which both "subjects" and "acts" come to appear at all' (Butler, 1993, p. 9). We can paraphrase this as saying that gender is never merely presented as a fact in self-portraits, because it is constituted in the act of self-

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[44] Although Butler stopped using this term in her later writing (Chambers & Carver, 2008), it remains useful for our discussion of the normative regulatory power of gender intelligibility.

presentation and representation. When we talk about girls' construction of identity, we are talking not about the conscious constructing and planning of the appearance of 'final' identity, similar to an architect's blueprint for a house, but rather the construction of gender through iterative acts, some deliberate and some unconscious. This reflects the frequent assumption about photography that there is an agent - the photographer - who plans the subject, and when and where to take the photograph; but in the everyday context of self-portraiture, it is more often the case that one thinks *through* and *in* the act of self-portraiture, that the action feeds into one's sense of being a subject.

The regulatory frame of the heterosexual matrix is what constitutes 'us'; it provides a limited number or repertoire of 'scripts' from which we 'make a constrained choice of gender style' (Salih, 2007, p. 56). The power of the performative is reflected in Currie, Kelly and Pomerantz's (2009) argument that gender essentialist discourse, such as heterosexism, in essence is a social construction, but becomes naturalised and accepted as 'common sense', which can be hard to challenge. To deconstruct where the power lies, we need to conceptualise the discourses of gender and girlhood as constituting an 'enabling process', which renders certain kinds of girlhood, but not others, 'thinkable and do-able'. Were we to exercise agency to challenge the regulatory power, we could not do so by 'standing *outside* the power', for agency is implicated in what it opposes (Butler, 1995, p. 137). We could do it only by 'rework[ing] the very conventions by which we are enabled… and [deriving] agency from the very power regimes which constitute us and which we oppose' (p. 136). How this can be done in practice is not clear because even to disrupt this regulatory frame, it may be necessary to employ 'socially defined codes for "doing" femininity or masculinity (Cavanagh, 2007, p. 130), a practice that Butler warns can deepen the belief in gender essentialism. In Section 7.5 I try to show how a few participants' parody play of conventional femininity carries the potential to challenge the heterosexual matrix from within by making explicit the practice which has come to mark people as proper, intelligible gendered subjects.

The acts of self-representation in self-portraiture through various poses and photographic tropes can be seen as performative, a mimesis of what girls imagine

girlhoods are (or should be) like, from what they see in their social world – their peers or the media images of girlhood. Specific forms of femininity become embodied in girls' performative acts, which seek to represent, articulate or assert what femininities are. Seeing the body as an object on which culture registers its impact fails to consider women's agency (Budgeon, 2003). It is a process that culture, self and the body mutually shape in a non-linear manner. Budgeon's interviews with young women reveal that 'the changes they would like to make would result in them having more impact or an enhanced sense of agency. The emphasis is not on "looking" but on "doing"' (p. 47). In terms of Butler's performative language, this would mean that what is said is not as important as the act of saying it. This helps to explain why girls enjoy self-portraiture – it is a minor, non-committal body transformation, but one that can confer a sense of agency, of being able to experience play or serendipity with the body or by manoeuvring the body. Although the finished look may not be as close to the ideal as the subject would like, or as perceived by others, there is an enhanced sense of agency. Self-portraiture is often about learning, deliberation, or 'speech' acts (Duits & van Zoonen, 2007): one engages with corporeal bodies and articulates how the person wants to be seen. It is an act of bringing subjects' perceptions and desires to personal reality. One does not know what the narrative of self should say, until there have been multiple revisions and rewrites. As one's 'identities in action' (Weber & Mitchell, 2008) develop, so do one's self-portraits.

7.3   Cute Femininity

Self-portraiture involves playing with facial expressions, hands, body poses, dress styles, camera angles, etc., which provide opportunities for girls to tweak their self-representations, to present an ideal image of self. Camera angles appear to be important for the composition of a photo as they determine the perspectival framing. When asked 'what suggestion would you give to someone who self-portrays for the first time', Lizzy said that 'finding a good angle is the key, as it can highlight or conceal'. Smiley and Milk both elaborated on the ideal angle being a 'downward angle' because it makes the face appear smaller, the eyes look bigger, and the body look slimmer, resulting in a look

that conforms to the heteronormative beauty ideal in Taiwan. In Section 7.3 I discuss the cute image, and in section 7.4 I discuss the sexy image. Using these two popular images as examples, I show how gender identities become embodied through seemingly playful photographic practice.

While girls undoubtedly portray themselves in a variety of ways, the hyper-feminine look, exemplified by cute/innocent expressions and poses that emphasise softness, innocence, cuteness and vulnerability are predominant in girls' self-portraits (see findings in Chapter 4). In the interviews, 'posing cute' emerged as the pose that all the girls have tried. It is interesting that some participants think of the cute look as just one among many poses, while others unquestionably see it as the natural, default way of representing oneself. When asked why they adopt 'cute' poses, Smiley said 'there is no particular reason. They're all natural poses'; Minnie said 'I don't know, just suddenly thought of doing it…just for fun'. One of the common ways to emphasise cuteness, as shown in Chapter 4, is through self-touching gestures, which project the visual effect of the self being delicate. For instance, when Tia was asked why she posed with her hands touching her face, she said: 'Because of my facial expression, the hand gesture has to integrate into the facial expression. It's not for a particular reason, I'm just naturally like that'. Bing described why she stuck out her tongue, saying that 'Well, it's probably like…feels cuter. =.=''[45] I don't know either. It [the tongue] just spontaneously sticks out. XD ….'. When I asked what about the pose of putting the hand on top of head, her response was 'It's a habitual motion!!'. Bing's account demonstrates her uncertainty about the purpose of this pose, and her awareness that it *probably* means cuteness is only realised in retrospect; at the moment of self-portraying, these poses are unplanned. What is intriguing here is that, what appears to onlookers to be a contrived pose, which results in a cute/innocent look commonly linked with femininity and childlikeness, is described by the girls as natural and original, that just *happened* at the moment. It seems that they provide post hoc justifications to explain something that they had not reflected on. This naturalisation of the cute pose in the self-portrait is reminiscent of the friendly, toothy smile, now considered not uncommon, that Kodak originally used in its marketing

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[45] =.=" is an emoticon that means confused, or making an odd face.

campaign, *as something natural,* to promote the association of home photography with happiness and fun (see Chapter 5).

While the participants quoted above consider cuteness as natural, others talked about it in terms of their individual styles. For instance, when Millie was asked why she posed with her hands touching her face, she explained: 'it's just habits, so my face looks smaller and longer.... It's just a pose, not trying to express anything. Everyone has their own style and habit'. In the quote below, I asked Sunny (15) to think about why she posed in certain ways, and what they might mean:

> Researcher: So what impression do you want people to have, when they see your self-portraits?
>
> Sunny: Hmm.. I don't know.
>
> Researcher: So what have your friends said about your self-portraits?
>
> Sunny: They all say it's very cute.
>
> Researcher: Haha. Do you like to give a cute impression?
>
> Sunny: Uh-hum. Haha.
>
> Researcher: [Referring to a self-portrait in which Sunny looks directly at the camera, with four fingers covering the mouth, as if looking a little surprised]. So why do you self-portray with your hands on the mouth? What does it mean?
>
> Sunny: I suddenly thought of it =)) So I posed like this.
>
> Researcher: [Referring to a self-portrait in which she pouts and winks one eye] What about this one, why do you wink in this portrait?
>
> Sunny: =)) Hmm. Many poses are sudden muses =))
>
> Researcher: Do you discuss self-portraiture with friends? For example, new faces or new poses?
>
> Sunny: Not really. But I do browse others' albums and look at their poses and etc. […] I browse those that are selected on Wretch front-page
>
> Researcher: Do you go to the front-page every day?
>
> Sunny: Hm! I go when I have free time.

Neither Millie nor Sunny considered the implications of these cute poses, and when prompted about their meanings attributed them to idiosyncrasy or sudden inspiration, although Sunny did admit to looking at others' self-portraits whenever she has time. Duits and van Zoonen's (2007) study of girls wearing headscarves and G-strings also found that, despite the widespread currency of them as a style, girls saw 'those as individual judgments denying all influences from the outside world' (p. 162). To an extent, the poses and gestures that girls adopt repeatedly are original and creative for

them; they conceived of the various codes of representation within their own contexts and what might appear to the onlooker as identical poses may have different meanings for the girls. However, we need to be careful about celebrating individuality at the expense of situating these individual choices in the broader context. Looking at the self-portrait albums posted on Wretch, the cute look is a noticeable pattern or, as Gill (2007b) puts it: 'one could not help but wonder why there is no greater diversity' (p. 73).

Lizzy and Milk were both aware that the facial expressions of puckered lips or sticking one's tongue out are acts of 'playing cute'. Lizzy explained that 'playing cute is like what Rainie Yang [a popular Taiwanese star who calls herself "the founder of cute-playing religion"] does'. Vicky admits to liking the style of 'big eyes, natural look', and elaborates that 'my hand is part of the "accessory" so when my mouth doesn't look good in certain angle, I use my hand to cover it'. It seems that, whether or not participants are conscious of what meanings these cute poses serve, the stylised performance that enacts a particular kind of heteronormative cute, girlie image – cute femininity – and has become a 'girling' activity (Butler, 1994), through which they actively construct and present themselves as girls. The inter-textual referencing and reiterative citations of such collectively defined hyperfemininity in self-portraits do just what Butler (1993: 12) claims, to 'conceal or dissimulate the conventions of which it is a repetition'. We can see cute femininity as a part of what Currie, Kelly and Pomerantz (2009) call the 'trump discourse of gender essentialism' which 'operate[s] as "common sense" to members of a community of practice. … They sustain collective action while remaining unspoken' (p. 192). The girls who practise cute femininity in self-portraits seldom question the purpose of such hyper-feminine poses, and the cuteness appears as simply naturally part of being a girl.

However, this excessive citation and repetition reveals the constructed nature of these hyper-feminine representations. Yuki's outright critique of the cute style makes explicit the contrived and constructed nature of cuteness: 'Every time I look at the albums [of 'beautiful chicks'], I always have the same comment: If I were skinnier, wore makeup and pupil magnifiers, then I can be the 'diva of popularity'!!!' Refi, who studies

graphic design and has a less mainstream taste for creative designs and underground bands, offers a critical account of the cute look. She said that sometimes when she sees girls' self-portraits on the Wretch front-page, she thinks 'ah, this person is cute', but once she clicks in she feels the impression is 'shattered', 'because some people rely on the angle, they only look good in certain angles'. So after seeing a couple of them she was 'unimpressed'. She dislikes the puckered lips cute look, because she feels 'I am being so hell pretentious'. She has actually tried to pose as cute, but felt it did not suit her. Now she does not try those faces because 'I'm worried that when I see those portraits I feel it's so sad of me [to do so]'. Yuki and Refi's accounts reveal a feminine ideal that has multiple origins, ranging from the East Asian cult of Western beauty aesthetics (big eyes, fair skin), comic book characters of girlish personality, and the particular cult of cuteness in East Asian cultures, all of which contribute to produce this mashed-up hyper-feminine look produced in various forms of media content that has no natural origin. These looks are a simulation of ideals which do not have a reality, they are in Baudrillard's (1983, p. 2) words, 'copies without original', a 'hyperreality' that has come to exist in its own right as a reality, and 'through the apparatus of the screen and the apparent superiority of celebrities' taste, [are] made to seem "natural"' (Fraser, 2007, p. 190).

As these participants' accounts show, being able to present oneself (favourably) as cute or beautiful is not organic knowledge, but requires extensive practice and knowledge of particular 'codes' of performative tropes, particular taste and the material resources to produce representations of the hyper-feminine. From Goffman's dramaturgical viewpoint, we can argue that gender is a performance that requires 'cultural competence, that the individuals in social situations are able to play well, to perform the culturally prescribed roles that are tied to gender' (Stewart, 2003, p. 776). However, since attention to femininity traditionally is associated with narcissism and vanity, but not rationality of mind, women's focus on femininity is often described in derogatory terms (Smith, 1990), and they are forced to make the self appear naturally feminine, flawlessly naturalising 'an extremely constructed image that required diligent

and constant skill and work' (Black & Sharma, 2001, p. 92). In this sense, the cute image can be seen as a 'gender achievement' (Nayak & Kehily, 2008).

So is engagement in cute self-portraiture related to participants' distance from the 'game', is it because girls feel compelled to emphasise cuteness because of their age (maturity), physical appearance or even social class? This seems unlikely from evidence provided by the Wretch front-pages and the interviews. Wretch shows both teenage girls and women in their 30s engaging in the same cute portrayals, although in pictures of adult women there are additions of sexiness, resulting in a cute-alluring look characterised by a cute/innocent face combined with a sexy pose and revealing clothes. The contextual information provided by girls from privileged backgrounds shows they are just as likely to pose as cute as girls from working class backgrounds, although there are distinctions in taste. We see attractive girls adopting the same cute poses as plain girls. In the interviews, girls from well-off families, such as Tia, Yaya and Jo, and girls from working class families, such as Pinpin and Jie, all engaged in cute portrayals. Extremely pretty participants, such as Stella and Faye, expressed the same dissatisfactions with their bodies as other participants, and sought to gain confidence through cute self-portrayals. This is not to suggest that all girls of all ages, physiques and socioeconomic backgrounds engage in cute self-portrayals, but among those girls who do, these social-demographic factors do not appear to differentiate among them.

Chapter 4 showed that a majority of girls and boys (re)present themselves following the norms and ideals of gender images that society encourages and values. It may be because stereotypical images are a shortcut to alignment with a group identity of 'normal' and likeable. Perhaps their engagement should be understood in terms of capital (Bourdieu, 1986), that the body bears a symbolic value, and is a form of physical capital. The performance of cuteness might provide the symbolic power that some use for 'conscious manoeuvring and self-redefinition' (Chuang, 2005, p. 25) such as getting one's own way or deflecting conflict. In discussing teenagers' clothing choices, Auty and Elliott (2001) argue that 'teenagers are not trying to be like other people as much as trying to be liked by them' (p. 240). In other words, the knowledge of how to use the codes of self-(re)presentation, such as clothing or photographic poses, serves as

symbolic capital for some teenagers to gain approval, and confirm one's position in the peer group, since 'any failure to do so can lead to exclusion or a rejection from the group' (p. 209). Auty and Elliott stress the importance of position in a peer group as defined by a shared culture. It is important also to have a position as a girl in the heterosexual matrix, because position confirms one's intelligibility as a gendered subject, which then allows one to 'speak' and 'speak back' to outside interests (Currie, Kelly, & Pomerantz, 2009, p. 190). This might explain why, when asked how they come up with representational styles, few girls said that they learned from or mimicked other girls although similarities are obvious. For the girls, the purpose is not to imitate, but to demonstrate knowledge and mastery of the cultural codes associated with the norms of heteronormative femininity, which are given high value as symbolic capital in their social world; in doing this, they 'qualify and remain a viable subject' (Butler, 1993, p. 232). But once the 'cute girl' subject position is confirmed through successful demonstrations of possession of the knowledge, cultural competence and a sense of the game/codes, some participants talked about growing tired of self-portraiture practice, while others explored less conventional ways of representation that accentuated individuality, as exemplified by the 'ugly/goofy self-portraits' discussed in Chapter 6.

7.4 'Sexy But Not Slutty': Practices and Views on Sexy Self-Portraits

Another type of look frequently observed on Wretch is the sexy look, although the content analysis in Chapter 4 found few teenagers represent themselves in ways that accentuate sexuality. A few of the interviewees take advantage of self-portraiture to explore and articulate sexuality, but most were only audiences of others' sexy self-portraits. Sexiness is a concept that everyone seems to understand immediately, and yet is defined in individual ways. Despite moral panics about the sexualisation of culture and unsettled scholarly opinion on its potential harmful effect on girls (Buckingham, 2009; Duits & van Zoonen, 2011; Evans, Riley, & Shankar, 2010; Gill, 2008; Machia & Lamb, 2009), the girls understand and interpret sexiness or sexualised self-representation in different ways. For some, sexiness is contingent upon whether it is conveyed with style and taste, for others sexiness is readily associated with glamour, as

something positive, for yet others sexiness is akin to flaunting the body and has negative connotations. Due to multiple perceptions of sexiness, in the interviews I did not define what I meant by 'sexy self-portraits', or give specific examples; I allowed participants to share their thoughts about what they considered to be sexy portraits in order to see how their interpretation of sexiness reflected their performative construct of this term. Also, as Buckingham (2011) argues, there is no natural sexuality prior to the introduction of sexuality as experienced in consumer culture and media culture. Sexuality, like identity and the body, is constantly shaping and being shaped by the interactions with the world, media and consumer culture being part of it. Media content serves as a point of identification, and in talking about media content, children align themselves with a certain position. My aim was to see how participants' descriptions defined their subject position as being 'that kind of girl' through identification or dis-identification with sexiness.

7.4.1 Views on sexiness

Participants' reactions to viewing sexy or sexualised self-portraits are organised around three themes, which echo the wider cultural framing (Kitzinger, 2007) of sexiness in, but not exclusive to, Taiwanese society. These themes are: pleasure and aspiration; age/gender appropriateness or respectability; and aesthetics and taste. Because participants' ways of understanding sexiness is diverse and not neatly organized around one single cultural framing, as a result, these themes identified were intertwined, and often a participant's view could be a mixture of two themes or even all three of them.

The first theme is about viewing sexy portraits as 'eye-candy', that it is a pleasure to view beautiful, sexy, female bodies, mixed with aspiration to have such a glamorous body one day. For example, Aurelia felt the sexy portraits were 'so beautiful' and aspired to have a body like theirs. She thought of taking sexy portraits, but in the end did not because she felt her figure was not good enough. Lizzy expressed the same concern: 'I want to try some different way of self-image, like showing a little bit [of the skin]', but admitted that the main reason she did not try was because she does not have a good figure. Jessica said that: 'I get unexplainably excited because sexy photos can be eye

candy! But for those [posers] who don't have the look/body, I am amazed by their courage [in showing their bodies]'. For herself, she does not think the sexy style suits her because 'just my height [160cm] is not enough to be sexy... It's just that however you look at it, short is always cute [not sexy]'.

Holly often views sexy self-portraits with male friends in computer sessions at school and chats about parts of the body such as cleavage. If she spots sexy self-portraits when she is alone, she tends even to note down the URL and share it with male friends later. For her, self-portraits were a spectacle and discussion of them is friendship work. When asked if she felt awkward viewing these sexual(ized) images in the company of boys, she stressed that her personality was 'just boyish', as if the boys did not view her as a girl, so there was no awkwardness. Like several other girls, Holly does not consider taking sexy self-portraits because she has 'a baby face and no body figure'.

While looking and admiring the sexy bodies is a pleasurable experience to these girls, their reasons for not taking sexy self portraits include that a requirement is a specific body, tall, slim, 'good', which would look good in a sexy pose. Perhaps this is not surprising since many sexy self-portraits conform to a narrow beauty standard and those that do not conform earn hostile comments from audiences, which are intended to deter their subjects from seeking to present themselves in sexy ways. This echoes Gill's (2008) critique that, despite the talk of girl power and female assertiveness now prevailing in media contents, it seems that not all bodies are equal – only the slender, sexy and 'rightly raced' body is entitled to assert sexual agency.

Another theme identified from girls' discussions about sexy portraits was age appropriateness and gender respectability (Skeggs, 1997). For instance, Cindy does not consider taking sexy photos and thinks 'some of the self-portraits are not just sexy photos, but nude photos... very disgusting'. Although she likes to view photos of 'beautiful chicks', she could not see the purpose of posting near-nude portraits, asking 'what's the point? Everyone has it [the female body]'. Ling thinks that the girls who take sexy self-portraits are seeking attention with a view to being befriended by boys. Cecia

tries to understand why some girls might want to show off their bodies, yet looks at it from the perspective of being respectable. She says: 'I don't like it. Why let everyone see your body? But maybe she really likes her body, the same as we like our faces.' She does not consider taking those photos, 'because it makes me feel cheap, like those betel nut girls'[46]. Rosie rejected the idea of sexy self-portraits for similar reasons. She said: Those look a bit like bartending chicks/chicks who work at exclusive clubs'.[47] Here, Cecia, a middle-class girl who is enrolled in a top high school and preparing for college entrance exams, and Rosie, a girl attending the top university in Taiwan, both use the discourse of respectability to distinguish themselves (what they do not do) from the girls who reveals their bodies and are, in their view, cheap and not respectable.

A generational discourse of sexuality (Renold, 2005) is also used to explain the reasons for taking or not taking sexy self-portraits. Alicia, who tries a bit of sexiness in her portraits, says: 'because I'm getting older, it's not a good idea to always have a cute style'. However, Layla commented that: 'Wait until I'm older, haha. After all I'm still young. If I take those, I'm afraid people might say I'm slutty'. Yaya concurred: 'If I cannot get a sexy effect, I feel embarrassed. Besides, friends would make fun of me XD. I don't quite like those slutty photos, it's not suitable for my age'. It seems that to some girls' sexiness is used to declare a more grown-up status, yet girls are also cautious of being labelled 'slutty'. Yaya's account is particularly interesting, for she pointed to the difficulty of 'getting it right' in terms of style and degree of sexiness. If she cannot successfully represent herself as sexy, then her failed attempts are embarrassing because they are unsuccessful. However, if she represents herself as too sexy, then she 'tries too hard' and the effect becomes slutty. This difficult balancing act of negotiating a sexy self-representation online while not appearing slutty in school is documented in Ringrose's (2010) study on girls' expressions of sexual identity on SNS.

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[46] Betel nut girls, or betel nut beauties are young women, most probably from working-class backgrounds, who sell betel nuts and cigarettes from roadside booths/kiosks made of glass and decorated with neon lights. When the competition for customers is fierce (e.g. when there are many kiosks on the same road), the girls often dress in revealing outfits (such as lingerie or bikinis) in order to attract customers.

[47] Girls who work at the exclusive clubs are required to chat, drink and play games with the customers as part of the duties. Some clubs permit/encourage the girls to offer sexual services to the customers, such as lap-dancing, sex games or escort services.

Although some girls gain confidence from exploring and presenting their bodies in sexualised ways (i.e. learning and adopting 'older sexualities') and looking at themselves from a different perspective, they also subject themselves to comments on their bodies that may become fierce and offensive, and criticisms of 'sexual excess', of being not respectable. Jessica also talks about 'some who you just can tell are showing off their bodies on purpose...If it's too contrived it's very phony'. Lucy, who is dating a boy five years older than herself, has to carefully balance her online and offline sexiness. She dresses 'more maturely' (with eye makeup and sexy outfits) when going out with her boyfriend in order to mingle with his friends, but she avoids taking sexy self-portraits, otherwise 'people in the dark' will gossip about her being slutty. This highlights the difficulty in the production of sexy (sexualised) girl-women: as well as knowing how to present oneself in a (sexually) desirable way while avoiding excessive sexiness, it is necessary to manage the offline self-presentation and the online self-representation so that they appeal to different audiences and do not clash.

7.4.2 A question of taste

While some girls criticised sexy self-portraits as inappropriate for the subject's age, or for appearing immodest and not respectable, hidden in their criticism are the themes of aesthetic taste and decency, which inform their assessment of whether sexy photos are attractive or disgusting. Pinpin, the youngest of my interviewees, referred to some sexy portraits as: 'so disgusting… they hurt the eyes. Because some people are just ugly but still like to take sexy self-portraits…' [But what if they are pretty?] 'Then it's more acceptable'. Huei said 'Some look very natural, quite pretty. But some are too revealing, or look like they are trying really hard. I think those look weird... Because I think to be sexy the most important is to have the figure, which I don't have, hahaha'. Although it is not possible to gauge what degree of sexiness they consider 'too much', it seems that what distinguishes their strong reactions to pretty versus disgusting is a variable standard involving 'how the sexiness is portrayed'. In other words, if the body is portrayed in a way that they consider is tasteful, then it can be pleasing to the eye. In contrast, if the

self-portrait appears to be an unskilled presentation of too much flesh, then 'it is disgusting' and 'there is no point'. With this unstable standard about appropriate sexuality, one cannot help asking who is in the 'right' position to make the judgment call, and whether declaring something as distasteful is a class prejudice in disguise (Bragg, 2011).

When asked about the kind of self-portraits they like, most girls referred to glamorous self-portraits of girls who demonstrated expertise in fashion and beauty culture and were 'savvy' about how to promote themselves online as micro-celebrities. Glamour is especially important in the context of sexy self-portraits because it may be seen as a trope that 'hold[s] together femininity and sexuality in a "respectable" performance' (McNay, 2005, p. 186). In Skeggs' (1997) study, she documents how young British working-class women use the styling of bodies to attempt to disavow class assumptions about the lower class presenting a social problem. It might be that girls from working class backgrounds use self-portraiture to mobilize their aspirations to look like a star or their dream of glamour, which signifies seemingly upward mobility, at least in terms of more 'cultured' taste. For girls from a more 'cultured' background, maintaining glamour in their sexy self-portraits becomes important because it is the way to demonstrate good taste.

7.4.3 Practices of sexiness

Those who express sexuality in their self-portraits explained it in three ways. First, some thought of play with sexuality and sexiness as having fun with friends. For instance, Brandy (17) posted on her profile on an online chat room 'dream find land' a self-portrait of herself and a friend doing a girl-on-girl mock kiss and said: 'We were just bored so we took these random photos'. This mock kissing, common in girls' self-portraits, can be interpreted in several ways. It can be a gesture of sisterhood, of showing how close and intimate the girls are with one another; It may be seen as girls playing with or challenging the heterosexual gender boundary; or it could be interpreted as the problematic mock hot-lesbian motif which Gill (2008) argues is distinctive in post-

feminist media culture.

Second, portraying oneself in a sexy manner can be an exploration of one's different side, and some would rather keep this exploration private. Stella (19) has an album of sexy self-portraits that she locks with a password. The album cover, visible to the public, is an image of her lying on her stomach on a bed wearing a tank top and knickers, looking carefree. To her, a sexy self-portrait is something which she 'just suddenly felt like… [I] also wanted to try a different style of portrayal'. The poses are learnt from magazines and internet shopping sites for girls' clothes. The fact that she reveals only the thumbnail of the album cover to public viewing, but keeps the whole album private with password access granted to none but her close girl friends, shows a thoughtful privacy control, in that she can make known to the public the fact that she *can* be sexy, but can still largely retain her privacy.

Third, some girls enjoy taking sexy portraits because of the opportunity it provides to express bodily confidence openly. Tia (16), who is confident and comfortable with her body from experiences of dance performance since elementary school, was among the first among her peers to take sexy portraits. Her idols are two females commonly touted as sex icons – Angelina Jolie and Megan Fox. She said that the ambience created by R&B music such as Rihanna or Ciara, often puts her in the mood for taking sexy portraits. Her girl friends respond to these sexy portraits with compliments, while boy friends give noisy cheers. Tia said that these positive reactions give her a sense of achievement. For Faye (18), the sexy style is her preferred representation because it is a way of saying 'I've grown up' and also it helps her to emphasise her femininity as physical capital on the dating website *AIO*,[48] which she has been using for two years. She said: 'The girls on *AIO* are almost always dressed in very revealing outfits, but I'm not as dramatic as them ^^~ [49]'. She became confident about her body when a member of staff in an underwear shop commented that she had quite a large cup size, which

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[48]*AIO*, when pronounced as one word, sound like 'love' in Mandarin. It is a Taiwanese dating site whose themes are 'romance, photographs and fun'. The website claims to be a 'healthy, happy and safe' dating site and prohibits the distribution of pornographic content on the site.
[49] ^^~ is an emoticon that means smiley eyes.

made her realise that her body figure is 'quite good'. The poses which she uses were inspired by a girl friend whom she met online. The friend used to post many sexy photos, but her site was subsequently closed by the system administrator, 'probably because the photos were too sexy' (the girl friend is a popular internet persona who also does modelling work). When asked whether she set a limit to the degree of sexiness, Faye said she would not reveal more than cleavage and legs, yet 'if my figure were nicer I definitely would portray myself in a bikini'. Compared with Tia, Faye's reasons for taking sexy portraits have a more practical purpose: Faye attends an all-girls nursing school and has limited opportunities to meet boys. Presenting herself in a sexy manner on SNS such as *Wretch* or *AIO*, she explained, helps her to stand out from other girls in order to attract potential suitors.

Sexy self-portraits are achieved mainly through outfits that reveal some of the body and the adoption of soft-porn representational styles and language such as looking seductive or vulnerable/innocent. Yuan (16) was one of the few participants who takes sexy self-portraits. Examples of her self-portraits include her on a bed wearing a button-down shirt and no trousers, looking innocently at the camera; lying on the bed with her cleavage and breasts accentuated, also looking innocently at the camera. These body poses and sartorial arrangements, when looked together with her baby face, immediately conjure up the image of a Lolita. Yuan has received unpleasant comments such as asking whether she wears trousers or knickers in those self-portraits. However, when asked whether those comments would make her want to change the privacy settings of albums or change her style of portraiture, she rejected the idea outright. For Yuan, dressing and posing as sexy in self-portraits posted to her *Album* is a decision made in her own space – a sign of autonomy– and therefore she would not allow the audience comments to affect how she uses her space.

Yuki (20), who said she took sexy self-portraits 'to give myself some confidence', talked candidly at length about her experiences with sexy self-portraits:

> Researcher: Why is this album titled 'Don't look, it's very scary'?

Yuki: Because for some people, big girls like me are very scary, so I remind them first. Also, the sexy photos in there would make some men lose control. [...] Because a lot of men get aroused after seeing my photos. ~"~ [50]

Researcher: Do they tell you so?

Yuki: Yea, my friend told me.

Researcher: Male friend told you so? So what do you think about it?

Yuki: It's disturbing and funny at the same time....Just don't tell me about it – If you have the [sexual] need, just take care of it yourself. Why tell me?

Researcher: So you don't mind that they get aroused by your photos?

Yuki: If I cared about other people's opinions, I would have deleted all my *Wretch* photos. Someone once asked if I do compensated dating … the photos are very sexy, he's willing to pay a high price.

Researcher: Really? How did you respond?

Yuki: I said, thank you for the compliment, but compared to money I care more about my soul. My mom would be distressed if she knew I was selling myself. Haha ^^ [51]

Yuki's account introduces several issues that young girls encounter. The open exploration and articulation of sexuality might increase the risk of receiving unwanted sexual contact online. The girl then must decide whether to ignore such responses and continue exercising their agency through self-portraiture, to retreat to 'safety' by not posting more sexy portraits, or to control the audience access by changing the privacy settings. Opportunities and risks have to be balanced. However, Yuki's and Yuan's experiences raises questions about their knowing that their sexy portraiture may be in line with male desires, and whether they are knowingly 'sexually subjectifying' (Gill, 2003) themselves in self-portraits for the symbolic reward of being looked at as attractive. Alternatively, is it a demonstration of their power to act as girls who are not shy of their sexuality and unaffected by the heteronormative voice that simply seeks to position them as objects of desire?

There are no simple answers to these questions which are further complicated by the polysemic nature of photographs. Without having to state the meanings of self-portraits explicitly, girls can take advantage of the gap between encoding and decoding (Hall, 1974/1980), leaving their photographic motif ambiguous so they cannot be held accountable when asked why they portray themselves in certain ways. In one of Yuki's

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[50] ~"~is an emoticon meaning 'feeling frustrated, or not knowing what to do'.
[51]^^ an emoticon that means smiley eyes.

(20) favourite self-portraits, she looks directly at the camera with eyes half open; she is dressed in pink 'baby doll' lingerie, with one strap sliding off her shoulder, revealing her cleavage and half of her left breast. When asked what she had in mind at the time, she gave a rather surprising non sequitur in response: 'I was hungry'. Another photo depicting her looking at the camera with one finger in her mouth, she described as 'that is showing off my nail crystal'. The explanation sounds plausible, but why, of all the possible poses to express hunger and show off the nail, did she choose poses with sexual overtones? Yuki was aware that the sexy genre is one of the many genres and that the effect of her sexy photos of 'making some men lose control', but when asked directly about her sexy portraits, she was reluctant to acknowledge that her practice is situated in a social context, one in which the desire for a male audience is expressed. Instead she stressed the individual aspect of her practice as if that were all she took into account. Yet one cannot reject the possibility that Yuki had produced her sexy portrait with some awareness of how a male audience might interpret it.

When asked why she captions her self-portraits as 'very slutty', Yuki responded 'because it's very slutty XD. Sometimes, self-mocking is the best joke'. Here Yuki demonstrates her knowingness with regard to the 'slutty' image and uses irony as playfulness to deflect and defend her own ambivalent feelings about sexy self-presentation (Genz & Brabon, 2009; Jackson, Ervin, Gardner, & Schmitt, 2001). Her hypersexualised appearance and behaviour are similar to what Gill (2011) observes to be a new female subject who is 'compulsorily required to display and demonstrate "technologies of sexiness"' (p. 65) and present herself as 'active, desiring, playful' (p. 64). Sexiness is seen as an important mode of agency and the expression of active sexuality, performed through revealing outfits such as lingerie, is equated with power and individuality. Agency is not achieved by challenging the way that male friends view her (photos) as sexual objects, but through her feeling of being desired by men and presenting herself in ways that happen to coincide with the masculine constructions of female sexuality, which reinforces the fact that self-esteem can result from self-sexualisation, and using the body as a form of 'currency' (Coy & Garner, 2010).

Yuki's case highlights the difficulty of analysing actions from the binary position of structure and agency. On the one hand, she clearly articulates the meaning and use of self-portraiture for her, refuting the influence of the audience, and saying that she takes sexy self-portraits for herself. It would be moralizing to judge her based on her chosen style of portrayal. On the other hand, if we set Yuki's sexy portraits in the cultural context of girls' self-portraits posted on Wretch, we can see that her choices of poses and dress are not dissimilar from those of many other girls. We cannot deny Yuki's agency simply on the grounds of resemblance to other girls' sexy portraits, but we must acknowledge that, while Yuki feels empowered because of the capacity to 'speak freely' (Duits & van Zoonen, 2006), it is questionable to what extent this kind of agency can challenge the heteronormative structure of power. Here we use the notion of 'readability' to examine Yuki's case. As Evans, Riley and Shankar (2010) argue:

> while female sexual identities may be performed in ways that subvert traditional discourses of femininity, this subversion is tempered in two ways: by the limitations imposed on who may participate in these practices, and by how they are read by others/the media (p. 124).

Yuki's efforts may be agentic, but the fact that she consciously works the camera so that she looks as though she weighs less than 60 kg, reveals that she tries to conform to conventional standards of beauty and sexiness. Also, her self-portraiture takes place in a context where the dominant discourse promotes conventional beauty standards, thus reducing the possibility of reading her self-portraiture as subverting conventional discourse of femininity

However, while it is hard to read subversion into heterosexual matrix of Yuki's practice, we should not forget the importance of pleasure and aspiration in the construction of gender identity. Some scholars contest that the discourse of women internalising oppression undermines the fact that, for some, 'sexual self-determination, expressed through the glamorous body, is a central component of identity, associated with pleasure and success' (Holiday & Taylor, 2006, p. 192) and that it may be one of the few ways in which the less privileged girl can achieve social recognition (McNay, 2005). Girls who are marginalised, whether for their size, ethnicity or socioeconomic background, are considered by feminists as most needing to be empowered (Walkerdine,

Lucey & Melody, 2001) and may simply find that conforming to rather than challenging the 'rules of the game' by investing in markers of conventional femininity offers more immediate social rewards. We should be careful about assuming that girls who 'perform emphasized femininity do so "unconsciously", while those performing alternative or resistant femininities make conscious choices' (Currie, Kelly, & Pomerantz, 2009, p. 193). Rosie (19), an attractive girl, who is unconfident about her appearance, attests to this. As a child, she was the subject of ridicule and laughter over her appearance and often suffered abuse such as 'you look as ugly as an ogress'. This experience left her feeling inadequate and led her to invest in the pursuit of ideal femininity by going on a diet and having some minor cosmetic surgery to 'improve' her appearance. Despite her cynical attitude to societal norms (elsewhere she talked about subversive thoughts of 'the bum lifestyle being quite cool'), she nonetheless finds investment in conventional femininity rewarding; she no longer is the butt of verbal abuse, and has become more confident.

How should we make sense of girls' participation in signs of femininities that seem to fall back on conformity to the heterosexual matrix? Bloustien (2003) argues that in her study of girls' play with a video camera, she observed 'exaggerated expressions of femininity' (p. 50), but she is hesitant to place these strategies or play on the part of girls at the polar ends of the dichotomous notions of agency versus structure, submission versus resistance, because the simplistic binaries fail to allow room for girls' 'ambivalent agency', which is their attempt to 'create a fit' between the structural constraints and expectations in their social world (p. 51). Whether girls aspire to a particular style of feminine beauty or negotiate the difficult position of being sexy but not slutty, they may be using the participation in conventional ideal femininities as an attempt to achieve social recognition, or in Butler's term to be 'intelligible', by investing in their body and appearance as corporeal capital (Schwarz, 2010) in order to achieve a position that balances the social and the personal.

7.5   Appearing Photogenic

The 'girl power' movement of the 2000s professed positive messages about girls' agency and resistance largely by depoliticized cultural engagement (Currie, Kelly, & Pomerantz, 2009), and a focus on mass consumption as a way to mould tastes and choices and, therefore, identities. One version of this girl power discourse operates in the language of 'transformation'—that a girl can transform herself through beauty practices such as dieting, makeup and fashion. While allusions to consumption of certain products for the transformation of identities is common in advertising and marketing (c.f. McCracken, 2008), we should be alert to such discourse co-opting the feminist political discourse of empowerment and suggesting that self-transformation through beauty practices has the same capacity to empower as in the political sense.

The consumption-oriented cultural climate of Wretch reifies the hegemony of conventional femininity, and commodifies the discourse of agency by suggesting that girls can transform themselves/their lives if they address their 'personal failings' through beauty practices. Femininity is only celebrated to promote a narrow agenda of physical attractiveness, and how girls can become 'beautiful chicks' through makeup or outfits. Figure 12 depicts a Wretch homepage on which appear advertisements with slogans such as 'the secret face changing techniques! In thirty minutes a homely girl can become beautiful chick!' or 'Taiwanese hot chicks are just as good! Grand reveal of sexy eye-catching dress style'. The message is that with the appropriate effort, skill and investment every girl can look pretty and feel empowered. The latent message is 'there are no ugly women, only lazy ones. If you don't make yourself gorgeous, you have only yourself to blame'.

Figure 12 A screenshot of Wretch frontpage

[This screenshot has been removed, as the copyright is owned by another organisation.]

For older girls who have learnt about make-up, being savvy about it appears to be one of the keys to being photogenic in self-portraits, along with some expertise in

photography in relation to the right angle and lighting. Girls use make-up to overcome what they perceive to be bodily imperfections and to construct a more ideal self-image. Props, such as false eyelashes and pupil-magnifying lenses, are commonly used to make the eyes look bigger, almost doll-like. As Chen's (2011) study of Taiwanese show girls reveals,

> 'beautiful chicks' have three secrets: pupil magnifying lenses, falsies and double eye-lid tape. Topping it up with skilful 'light touch' of heavy makeup (wears heavy makeup but still manages to appear as if bare-faced), any ordinary person can become a (mainstream) beautiful chick (section 6, para. 3).

Some participants take self-portraits on days when their makeup is particularly nice; others put makeup on before snapping self-portraits. Faye learnt about makeup and fashion through beauty bloggers on Wretch, and talks about makeup with enthusiasm: 'I might put on makeup immediately just because I want to take self-portraits. Wearing makeup for photographs, hahahaha, others all think I'm crazy…but removing the makeup is very tiring!' She adds: 'Or sometimes I take a portrait before I go out with makeup. Once I've learnt about makeup, I rarely self-portray without makeup. Of course I want to put my best face forward!! :)' Here Faye is suggesting that makeup has become inseparable from self-portraiture because she wants to ensure a good self-image. Her heightened body consciousness also includes her weight, about which she explained 'I didn't use to care about body image, but now that I've grown up and know how to dress, I feel that I should lose weight (laughs)'. Despite weighing less than the recommended weight for her height, Faye was particularly concerned about her weight at the time of interviews because 'it's summer, everyone likes to wear bikini. (sighs) But it's not for me, and I don't dare to, haha; otherwise people think I'm pregnant' [referring to her bulgy belly]. Mia, who was Faye's junior high school classmate, used the Mandarin expression 'when a girl grows up she undergoes 18 changes' to describe how dramatic Faye's transformation was after she was introduced to feminine beauty practices.

Tia was introduced to the world of makeup much earlier than her peers – in elementary school for her dance performances. Her classmates did not use makeup and

thought she was too mature. When asked why she started so early, she said naturally 'I love to be pretty!' Her digital camera is reserved for taking self-portraits when 'I spend efforts on putting makeup on'; on the other hand, she uses her camera phone for the everyday, casual self-portraiture, irrespective of whether she wears makeup or not. In the following quote, Stella also talks about how makeup is important to her:

> Researcher: So what do you like or dislike about your appearance?
>
> Stella: That's all from makeup :)
>
> Researcher: Haha, really?
>
> Stella: Haha, well, not completely.
>
> Researcher: So you don't think it's real?
>
> Stella: It's the complexion [that looks better with makeup]. People are always dissatisfied with themselves. […] Makeup has become a habit.

Stella modestly attributed much of her good looks to makeup, and how it has become an everyday habit. Her casual reference to dissatisfaction with her body shows that femininity is an impossible project, but signifies her acceptance of this dissatisfaction as the norm.

The use of makeup becomes so popular among girls in their late adolescence that Aurelia, a vocational school girl, expresses her confusion: 'everyone knows how to do makeup except me… I thought girls must learn to wear makeup… I don't know why I think so, but a lot of people wear makeup… I really don't know how to, and my boyfriend doesn't like it. I think just being natural is fine, right?'. On the one hand, makeup is such common practice among her peers that it seems the norm to her, something of a *must*; on the other hand, the fact that neither she nor her boyfriend finds it necessary, makes her slightly insecure about whether it is fine to just be natural, and so she sought confirmation from me.

Although makeup is perceived as crucial for some girls to be photogenic, a contrary trend of the 'bare face' look is also in vogue, not just in self-portraits, but in the general Taiwanese popular mediascape. Variety shows such as *KangXi Lai Le* and *Women Queen* often invite female celebrities/stars to remove makeup on the show to let the hosts and guests –all wearing perfect makeup – scrutinize their bare faces in close-up camera shots. When there is little disparity between the made-up and bare face,

celebrities are complimented for being born natural beauties; but when there is some disparity, the hosts and attendees openly criticise those females for 'failing' to take good care of the skin, ridiculing them for being born 'plain Janes', or joke about them deceiving people with heavy makeup. Those who are criticised do not question the criteria used to assess them, but instead often try to justify themselves by saying 'I did not sleep well last night', or 'I have been eating greasy food recently', but nevertheless accept the sometimes ruthless criticism with apology, admitting that it is their failing for not keeping themselves in the best shape. This is what McRobbie (2004) argues to be the 'normative discontent of the female body', in that young women are 'deeply invested in achieving an illusory identity defined according to a rigidly enforced scale of feminine attributes' (McRobbie, 2007, p.120). This kind of female humiliation is increasingly common in reality or make-over shows, in which the middle- or upper-class so-called experts – those who possess the cultural and economic capital to accrue 'good' taste and take up expensive body caring regime – have a licence to criticise participants for their lack of ideal femininity in the name of helping these females to improve themselves.

There may be subversive potential with the trend of revealing the bare look, because it draws attention to the instability of the feminine image, to what is 'falsely naturalized … through the regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence' (Butler, 1990. p. 187). Removing makeup, although not a parody of gender itself, serves the same purpose as parody, to '[reveal] that there is no original, only layers of performance' (Chinn, 2010, p. 113). In other words, in removing makeup such as false eyelashes, foundation, eye shadow, eyebrows, lipstick, etc., one by one the layers of what constitutes 'natural' femininities are removed, exposing that what appears to be innate and effortless is actually not. Butler (1993) argues that if agency is to be found, it lies 'paradoxically, in the possibilities opened up in and by that constrained appropriation of the regulatory law [of gender performance]' (p. 12). The performatives that naturalise gender can also be the forces that disrupt the gender norms from within. Whether the makeup removal trend consolidates our impressions of what genders *should* look like, or reveals constructedness depends on the reaction provoked by the disruption.

It is argued that the 'makeup removal' trend in the popular media is problematic in that it lays bare the contradictory nature as well as the impossibility of femininity – however, not to challenge the normative ideals of femininity, but to reinforce such ideals as appropriate and normal. On the one hand, the natural (no makeup) self is only praiseworthy if the bare look (in terms of skin condition and complexion) is almost as good as the groomed, made-up self. Otherwise, the natural, un-groomed self is seen as rustic, ugly, non-feminine and a personal failing. This double standard allows for those privileged to use the innate good look as a way to show distinction and, thereby, discrimination. On the other hand, those who fulfil the 'feminine duty' of taking care of themselves properly with makeup, are ridiculed for being made-up and artificial when their bare look is revealed. Women are caught in the 'damned if you do, damned if you don't' dilemma over beauty practices. In this discourse, the made-up self is largely taken-for-granted and naturalised as an essential part of femininity, while the natural, unmade-up self is stigmatized as a lack, a failure.

This 'makeup removal' trend gains currency because it claims to reveal what is generally hidden from the public eye. It encourages a 'cult of the bare look' in self-portraiture, with girls posting portraits where they claim to be wearing no makeup. This new interest in the 'natural self' signifies not a looser, more diverse beauty standard, but a beauty standard even more difficult to maintain – that one not only is expected to look nice with makeup, but also look nice without makeup. The bare look is a new way to show distinction. Although in some cases it is obvious that the good-looking bare face is achieved by adjusting camera angles, using lighting and even image-enhancing software to cover up blemishes, often girls have albums separated according to wearing makeup or not. This conscious separation works in two ways: First, it may be a statement that one is brave (read: pretty) enough to post these photos. For instance, Alicia has a self-portrait album called 'the bare look is also good good', about which she commented 'I feel I'm not the kind of person who looks horrible without makeup. The bare face is also alright'. But despite not wearing makeup, she still uses photo-editing software to add soft light to the photos for a 'blurry beauty' effect. Second, for the less confident, the announcement to an audience about 'what they will see' works as a 'warning' that they should prepare themselves for an imperfect, un-groomed self. Do or would boys/males

ever need to give this warning to their audiences? While this modest, sometimes self-deprecating gesture functions as a protective strategy against potential criticism, it nonetheless normalises the rigid social expectations regarding beauty practices, and also illuminates the extent to which femininity is constructed, although this construction is not easily challenged – and only apologetically.

The discourse of makeover and self-improvement reflects what Ringrose and Walkerdine (2008) argue as 'femininity … constructed as a site of limitless possibility for transformation and reinvention… in this self-shrivelling, self-governing process [of makeover] that comes to constitute an appropriate contemporary reflexive self-hood' (pp. 241-2). Stella's comment illustrates how makeup is considered a self-improvement that everyone can do.

> Researcher: Since when have you been wearing makeup?
>
> Stella: When I entered high school. But I have to clarify, haha, that I'm not a heavy makeup chick. Actually everyone can become pretty.
>
> Researcher: Why do you want to clarify? Is it not good to wear heavy makeup?
>
> Stella: If you know about skincare and makeup, now contact lenses are so popular, everyone can become a pretty chick. That's my thoughts. Heavy makeup is no good, guys don't like heavy makeup. Haha.

Another participant, Holly, likes to get together with friends during information technology classes in school to browse self-portraits online and comment on girls' appearances. She is significantly underweight (37kg/153cm) and extremely conscious of her body image, and wants her self-portraits to convey the 'wow, she's so skinny' impression. When I asked her to point me to some of her favourite self-portraits posted on Wretch, her immediate response was 'but I'm very ugly'. After I reassured her that it was only in order to understand her preferred style of presentation, she responded 'Oh I'm not worried about anything. I'm just worried that it might hurt people's eyes'. Later, when we discussed whether she is selective when sharing photos of her:

> Researcher: So do you pick and upload only the photos that you look particularly thin?
>
> Holly: Not really… Just yesterday someone said I looked fatter in photos, it really distressed me. I have not thought about how to photograph myself to be thinner.
>
> Researcher: To be honest, you look really thin in your photos.
>
> Holly: But why do people say it looks fatter than the real me? It really hurts me.

Researcher: It may be the angle.

Holly: Really? But I think it's me that's fat, not the photos.

She is an underweight girl who is on a diet to lose more weight (her goal is 35kg), and she is deeply troubled by the way that the camera appears to add pounds to her. She thinks that the problem lies with her, not with the camera or standards of beauty. This is what Bloustien (2003) criticises, saying that a certain normative discourse of femininity treats the body as fragments, and each can be improved or transformed by working on the body: 'the fact that the woman does not become the perfect ideal is not because the task is impossible, but because she hasn't been assiduous enough' (p. 92).

Among Cindy's albums is a locked one that contains her self-portraits—pretty ones, playful ones and ugly ones. She locks them 'because I'm too narcissistic', she said, although she sometimes shares the album with close friends. When asked if she would show me some of her favourite self-portraits, she said 'to be honest, there is none. Because I haven't changed to the way I am satisfied with'. As a student of cosmetology, she has an uneasy relationship with her body image – her goal is to lose weight to 45kg, have fair skin, and be more slender. She hopes her self-portraits will leave people with the impression that 'oh, this girl is not bad-looking', but at the moment, she does not really enjoy self-portrayal because of her perceived lack of beauty. As mentioned earlier, Cindy enjoys looking at the photographs of 'beauty chicks' on Wretch in her free time, and secretly adds some of them to her Wretch friend list. Despite her secret admiration for pretty girls, she also complained about being a woman: 'it's troublesome to be a woman.... if you act unusual [rude or barbarian], people would say you're a tomboy...It's troublesome and unnecessary'. On the one hand, she said she did not care about being criticised for 'not being womanly enough', but on the other hand, she still seems to want to pursue the same 'womanly' beauty ideal. The same contradiction is reflected in her attitude toward self-portraiture: on the one hand, she criticised that 'many girls all look the same [in self-portraits]… because they are really good at putting on makeup, and therefore it is important to have your unique style of portraiture', but on the other hand, she said modestly that 'I don't dare to learn the portraiture techniques of those beautiful chicks… because I simply don't compare to them'. It seems that Cindy is constantly

oscillating between her desire to become like those 'beautiful chicks' and the opposite desire that wishes to challenge the 'trouble' associated with conventional femininity. Cindy's reference to her potential future transformation echoes Fraser's (2007) comments on the women's makeover genre, that 'self-love and/or acceptance can only be achieved at the expense of self-loathing, where the feminine self is always deficient and in need of intervention' (p. 179).

Because of the light-hearted rhetoric of 'play' employed in discussing girls' use of style, cosmetics, camera angles, poses, commodities, etc., for self-transformation, these efforts become trivialized as 'just play', ritualised and naturalised as mundane and easy; they become something natural and essential, as 'can't do without'. The rhetoric of makeover through makeup or play with styles operates on the underlying assumption that 'good taste or distinction … can be learned by anyone because, paradoxically, despite surfaces, we "are all the same", and it is this promise of sameness that makes the makeover so appealing' (Fraser, 2007, p. 190). But the light-hearted discourse about makeovers overlooks the fact that the financial and cultural capital required for possessing good taste do not come naturally. The choice made by some girls to present themselves in ways that conform to beauty ideals may confer a sense of agency as being 'can-do', but this sense of agency is contingent upon participation in the pursuit of beauty as legitimized by popular culture. This empowering aspect of the makeover discourse not only does not consider the hard work and various forms of capital involved in a makeover, it also masks girls' anxieties about and dissatisfactions with their bodies, on a daily basis, under the guise of makeovers being fun and entertaining. Although girls are aware of the 'artifice' of the pretty look, they 'still absorb a sense of personal inadequacy' (Coleman, 2008) and use the narrow standard of beauty to assess whether or not their self-images or self-portraits are 'good'.

We could say that when girls choose to play by the rules of the field/game, then perhaps this gives them power and agency because they wield the power and can experience the effect of this power in their lives, such as increased visitors (as recognition) or compliments. Having the space for serious play or fantasy about a better self is important for girls' identity projects because they can strive for the ideal based on

self-accruable aesthetic knowledge, which can make them feel empowered about what their bodies can do. But we should recognise also that the contemporary discourse of self-transformation, whether through minor efforts such as makeup or major efforts such as cosmetic surgery, has two problems (Fraser, 2007, p. 192): Firstly, the 'tenuous sense of recognition' promised by self-transformation diverts 'feminist and political activity in the direction of heterosexual desirability'. The challenge then becomes that while we acknowledge the pleasures of self-fashioning, we need to maintain our critical stance 'when this also becomes a regime of self-regulation and self-scrutiny' (Attwood, 2005, p. 401)

7.6 Conclusion

Media representations of women's bodies and sexuality have been the subjects of debate in media, cultural and feminist studies. In the age of digital media, where girls are granted the position of being producers of their own representation, the matter is further complicated by the question of how they represent femininity and sexuality. In this chapter, we explored two popular self-representations – the cute and the sexy – and discussed how gender performativity serves to constrain the construction of gender identities while also allowing for challenges or disruptions. We have seen that, despite worries about the self-sexualisation of girls, girls do not accept or copy expressions indiscriminately. They make their own judgments about what is appropriate articulation of sexuality –mediated by taste – and some are aware that female sexuality involves a difficult balance. We have also seen that for girls, empowerment is quite strongly linked to the production of a 'naturally made-up' look, and a slim and sexy body achieved through mastery of the beauty culture. While the discourse of self-transformation masks girls' omnipotence, 'girl power' confers a sense of agency. We should not confuse personal agency with the kind of transformative agency that challenges structural constraints.

Self-portraiture is an attempt by girls to explore the adoption of a position in the heterosexual matrix that seems desirable and socially rewarding, within a space which they can adequately claim to have control over, where they are able safely to articulate

the 'missing discourse of desire' (Fine, 2003). In self-portraiture in the post-feminist media context, girls adopt the dual role of producer and consumer, engaging in self-presentation work that demands gender performance and authenticity, negotiating the difficult balance of assertive sexuality and sexualisation, managing an array of audiences in a collapsed context, trying to be assertive without being aggressive, showing care and attention to the self, but not excessive beauty practices, relishing moments of attention while being prepared for the unwanted consequences of attention. Stern (2006) suggests that girls' online activities are practice for 'how to be part of [the] culture', therefore, 'we might instead consider how normal it is for them to reproduce the images they see reinforced throughout our culture as desirable' (para. 3). Perhaps what is needed is not judgments, but rather recognition of the available options and limitations, and investigation of how we can widen the choices, lift the constraints and encourage more diverse ways of being a girl in the contemporary world.

Chapter 8 Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 1, this research originated in what now seems a simplistic and overtly optimistic question related to whether girls' self-representation (self-portraiture) facilitated by digital media challenges the gender stereotypical images in the popular media. This question later morphed into the less closed question formulated in Chapter 1, on the role of self-portraiture and related photographic practices on a SNS in girls' lives. To address this, this research examined teenage boys' and girls' self-portraits to identify similarities and differences in the visual tropes they adopt; it traced girls' everyday self-representational processes – from offline use of camera technologies to sharing activities and construction of spaces online – to see how their often banal, sometimes spectacular self-portraiture work is integrated in their social lives. Interviews revealed the girls' motivations for self-representation and their self-presentation strategies. We investigated girls' relations with two popular, yet contested, prototypes of self-representation – the cute and the sexy femininities – by looking at how girls understand and practise (or not) such self-representations. This chapter recapitulates the findings and how they relate to the theoretical discussion, provides a reflection on unconventional, challenging, but useful methodologies, and ends with some comments related to future work on girlhood, self-representation and the internet.

8.2 Summary of the Empirical Findings

The questions investigated in the thesis are situated in debates about social interaction online, self-representation and youthful engagement with content creation. The findings are discussed in relation to these areas of debate. This section discusses the empirical findings and how they address the four sub research questions posited in Chapter 1.

8.2.1 Photographic self-representation

The first research sub-question asked how teenagers represent themselves in self-portraits, what are their representational styles, and do they perform identity play via

self-portraiture; this question is addressed in Chapter 4. Content analysis of 2000 self-portraits of teenage boys and girls revealed patterns of representation that clearly are gender-specific; further analysis of the 169 profile self-portraits shows similar patterns of gendered representational styles. Despite the autonomy over ways of representing the self – when, where, for whom, in what poses, with what camera technologies, and the communication and sharing channels, the majority of self-portraits demonstrate similarities in relation to their employment of body language that is stereotypical of gender representations in the popular media. That is, girls are visibly more expressive in their facial expressions and body postures, and adopt body language such as pouting, self-touching, body-canting, etc., to convey an impression of cuteness – an ideal of femininity in Taiwan. Boys' portraits are less expressive, and tend to use body language to convey coolness and ferocity –which are seen as ideal masculinities. However, self-portraiture allows teenagers to define their self-image in non-gender-specific ways. The cluster analysis showed that one in three self-portraits demonstrates mixed representational styles that are not characterised solely by an emphasis on ideal femininity, masculinity or sexuality, although most self-portraits depicted the subjects smiling, suggesting that their purpose is to convey a sense of friendliness – a positive self-image on SNS. These findings suggest that despite the seemingly individualistic nature of self-portraiture, the possibility of it being posted online incorporates a social dimension that plays a role in how one portrays oneself, and the most common way is to resort to ideals as shortcuts – ideals about girls, boys, or sociality.

Another important finding was that 'dramatic' identity play is not common in self-portraiture despite the opportunity to experiment with different styles of representation via the camera. Examination of the degree of variation in each teenager's ten self-portraits, showed that for almost nine out of ten teenagers at least half of the sampled self-portraits fall into the same overall representational style. So, while self-portraiture provides opportunities for identity play and exploration, most teenagers present themselves using a rather consistent self-image. Although the interviews with the girls showed that some enjoyed playing with different 'faces' in their self-portraiture, this play with self-representation may still take place within one primary way of seeing oneself and presenting oneself, reflecting a more or less stable core identity.

The question of whether self-representation can promote a more 'realistic' representation of genders would seem not to be the most constructive question, because how the subject presents herself depends on the reasons for putting the self-portraits online. The qualitative interviews revealed that what appeared to the researcher to be gender stereotypes in self-portraits, were ideals for some girls. For many girls, self-portraiture is about presenting a favourable self-image, hence, adopting the popular tropes of representation serves as a shortcut to aligning oneself with the ideal feminine image – of being a 'properly' gendered subject – that is considered normal and important in society. At other times, self-portraiture is about presenting the 'real' self, and the girls adopted various strategies, such as playing 'goofy' or revealing 'the bare look', in order to authenticate the self-presentation.

8.2.2 Everyday photographic practice

The second research sub-question was about how girls engage with cameras and the role of personal photographic practice in their social relations. Chapters 1 and 5 show that developments in camera technologies and digital content sharing facilitated the use of photographs for self-representation; but, as Buckingham (2009) notes, it is not just the technological affordances that contributed to the popularity of lay-people producing their own media content, but the increased individualisation in late modernity that propels one to construct a biography of a self that is coherent. The findings in Chapter 5 show that while scholars tend to study different camera technologies as different media with different technical specifications and skills requirements, and serving different purposes, girls adroitly mix-use various camera technologies – camera phones, digital cameras and, less often, webcams – and integrate them in their everyday lives for their own defined purposes.

Some scholars argue that the lack of effort involved in taking photographs and their abundance has meant that photographs have lost their value; however, this was not what we observed in the present research. Girls have more opportunities to record moments in life they consider personally meaningful and memorable – they may not be

memorable in the traditional sense of formal events or rare occasions that serve collective social purposes, but they are moments that serve individual purposes and are of personal significance to the girls. Here, the importance of photographs shifts from 'what does this photograph mean to a group of people such as the family' to 'what does this photograph mean to the photographer'? Photographs still play important social roles in girls' social relations; however, in the past, personal photographs were deemed important primarily according to socially-defined standards (i.e. rituals and celebrations), while this research shows that personal photographs have become socially important based on the meanings that the photographers (the girls) ascribe to them. Indeed, the personal significance of photographs is shown in how their photographs and albums are organised. The girls tend to group photographs in categories that are meaningful to them while abiding by Wretch's rule of assigning a topic to each album in order to enable indexing and search. This encourages girls to construct a narrative about the photographs, based on a common theme, and, in the process of selecting, editing, and grouping, they reflect on and (re)construct the importance and coherence of the these photographs and their place in their lives.

In crafting their Wretch spaces, girls engage with multimodal textual, visual and audio content and collectibles in order to express themselves – who they are and what they cherish. They frequently mix and match ranges of stylistic features (such as album background themes, banners, icons, 'stickers', etc.) and content features (i.e. music) from the selections provided by Wretch or their commercial sponsors, with their own or others' designs, to achieve a personalised look and feel of the space. Some girls even incorporate music into parts of their Wretch presentations so visitors browse their albums in a (musical) context set by the girls. For the girls in this study, constructing and maintaining the façade of their space is about achieving a balance between the impression they want to give, and their state of mind. Some talked about building an ambience that is 'warm' and 'clean' – taking into consideration the impression on viewers, while others talked about building the space with elements that reflected their current state of mind, such as insecurity about the future or conflicting values and aspirations. The technical skills required to modify the space are self-taught or peer-mentored and perfected through trial and error. The ability to craft a space according to

one's preferences confers an important sense of achievement and autonomy, and a sense of agency, and the impression that what one does can take immediate effect in the visual representation of one's identity, which contributes to identity work.

Although the everyday personal photographs and self-portraits posted on Wretch may seem banal and sometimes self-indulgent, the online-sharing of photographs is an act that conflates the personal and the social in one space. This is made clear when girls discuss the reasons they started using Wretch referring to peers, sharing, self-expression and memory work. Most girls' use of Wretch was due to peer influence, and friends or romantic partners were the most common subjects of their photographs, and family the least. Further analysis shows that self-portraiture and more general photo-sharing online, can be understood as visual forms of self-disclosure that enable online social communication and maintenance of personal relationships. Chapter 5 shows that this self-disclosure via personal photographs allows communication of aspects of the self to relational partners – either very specific ones or 'generalised others' – and that such visual self-disclosure as communication tests and provides social validation, and exercises control over sociality that takes place through a Wretch Album. It provides opportunities for self-clarification and self-expression that are beneficial at the personal and social levels, fosters new relationships and consolidates existing ones. From this perspective, what often is seen as narcissistic and self-absorbed can be understood more constructively. It shows how the making and posting of personal photographs plays an important role in girls' social relations and their identity work.

8.2.3 Identity, performance and performativity

The third research sub-question explores girls' self-presentation in relation to the ideal and the 'real' self-image, and the meaning given by these different ways of self-presentation. The fourth research sub-question explores how a gendered version of self is constructed and performed through 'posing as a girl' in self-portraits. These two questions are addressed in Chapters 6 and 7 respectively, where I exploit Goffman's (1959) dramaturgy metaphor and Butler's (1990) gender performativity to analyse the deliberate and unconscious enactment of one's identity online. The concept of 'play'

was also used to investigate how the casual practice of self-portraiture entails serious testing and rehearsal of different ways of 'doing' gender and performing a character, which can be pushed toward either direction to become realised as a 'fact' or remain as something fluid or purely fantastical.

For many of my participants, self-portraiture was about presenting an ideal or enhanced image of the self and, perhaps not surprisingly, physical attractiveness emerged as the primary way of defining what is seen as ideal, since the predominant focus in self-portraits is the face. But self-portraiture is also employed to present more than a pretty face: the camera works as a lens through which one can see oneself and engage in 'identity play' of all kinds of possible or impossible images of self, such as appearing more mature, appearing sexy, or appearing different from the self in everyday offline contexts. Thus, self-portraiture constitutes an important space for fantasy, because it allows both serious and fantasy play to be performed in privacy before the pictures are made public. By playing with images, media technologies, poses, clothing and sometimes props, girls articulate through their self-portraiture what in everyday life may be hidden or unspeakable due to a variety of constraints, including physique, adult supervision or peer criticism. The act of 'going public' can be defined and practised in several ways: from hidden to public albums, from online representations to incorporation in the corporeal body in everyday life, and from suppression in everyday life to presentation of an online self-image. Each represents a boundary that can be tested, crossed and re-stabilised.

In the exploration of possible embodiments, participants are articulating what they believe those identities *should* look like, what they *want* the identities to look like, and to a lesser extent, what the identities *could not* possibly look like in the corporeal body. Self-portraiture is not the practice of capturing a pre-existing reality of one's identity, but about creating, performing and experiencing different subject positions. This point about self-portraiture being the performance of one's beliefs and fantasies about particular subject positions leads to a deeper level of performance – that is, performativity. As Currie, Kelly and Pomerantz (2009) differentiate between

performance and performativity: performance is something we are consciously aware of and experience, performativity 'refers to processes that usually operate below the ordinary level of consciousness' (p. 11). Therefore, we can say that for participants who think of certain contrived poses as 'natural' and are unconscious of why they cite some ideals as norms for self-presentation, these can be seen as performative acts in Butler's sense, through which they perform a 'properly feminine' subject. For those who are conscious of what poses and expressions give rise to certain impressions, it is as an act of performance, in Goffman's sense, that one employs certain 'fronts' in order to leave on the audience the intended impression, but it is also a performative act, because, in the deliberate citation of acts that constitute a certain front, one is reinforcing the performative power of what those acts are said to convey. In either case, whether or not the girls are conscious of the meanings of poses, their underlying assumptions about what makes the ideals ideal, and what makes certain ways of representation less favourable are equally interesting.

Butler's theory of gender performativity allows us to understand the relations between the body, one's self-image and one's gender identity. Self-portraiture illustrates perfectly that it is the doing and acting that makes one who one claims to be. Whether it is cute femininity or sexy femininity that one wants to project through self-portraiture, the representation is not achieved simply through a single snapshot based on an organic, inherent knowledge about femininity. The representation will be the result of multiple experimental photographs, and accumulated knowledge about how to operate the camera in order to achieve the optimal result in terms of lighting and camera angle, and knowledge about performative tropes and tastes in relation to what constitutes the 'right' level of cuteness or sexiness – that will be seen as neither pretentious nor excessive. These hyper-feminine poses naturalise a feminine image that is mediated at many levels to appear as an unmediated, authentic representation of a feminine core essence, which is a normative ideal of femininity. In the enactment and citation of 'performative acts' or 'speech acts' that are said to be a natural quality of femininity, one invokes conventions or ideals that help to define them and to reinforce who they are: it is 'in the act of

citation the authority of that model is simultaneously reconstituted' (Brady and Schirato, 2011, p. 46).

Although some participants attributed the performative tropes they employed in self-portraits to individual idiosyncrasies, the results of the content analysis confirm that these tropes are reiterated and reproduced in many teenagers' self-portraits. Rather than seeing this as a media effect, we can understand it in the context of Bird's (2010, p. 94) argument that the media provide 'scripts, imagery and symbols' for how we perform and behave. Girls not only draw on normative ideas about femininity as gender scripts, they exploit how these gender scripts are performed in the self-portraiture genre as 'media scripts'. While gender scripts mediate how one thinks about ideal femininity, media scripts mediate how one thinks about self-representation in terms of the tropes of representation, the recognised aesthetics, etc. Although in research practice it is difficult to study this mediation process at work, it must be remembered that identities – in this case, gender identities – cannot be enacted without a performative act because identities do not exist in a cultural vacuum. Buckingham (2009) notes that, 'creativity is not simply a matter of spontaneous "self-expression" but something that occurs within – and indeed depends upon – particular social contexts and cultural conventions' (p. 235). Therefore, we should not be surprised at the way girls invoke certain dominant tropes from the broader culture of self-portraiture in the digital age, to organise their own self-presentations. Posing (or not) is not merely a matter of describing or stating facts about one's identity, it is through the deliberate or unreflexive/unconscious citation of gender performatives that the girls come to terms with who they are.

Self-portraiture is both a private practice and public performance in which girls engage as part of their project of self. Every self-portrait is a visual narrative that constitutes her biography, capturing the embodiment of her identity at various moments in life. She may decide to change the way she frames herself or persist with a current role performance according to the audience response in the forms of visitor rates or comments on the guestbook. She may want to follow the dominant representational style of others' self-portraits, or express her aversion to it by subverting the established

repertoire of performance. Self-portraiture is an everyday private practice in the sense that girls explore and express their inner selves just as they would through writing a diary or gazing at themselves in a mirror. It is an everyday public performance in the sense that girls negotiate self-identity with normative values to enact a role in which they find a position that encompasses the right balance, that lets them perform without discomfiting the observing audience.

8.2.4 Self-portraiture as a means of exclusion

While self-portraiture does offer opportunities for new ways of communication and self-exploration, and in some cases allows one to put the best face forward, we need to be wary of how it could be practiced as, and operate as, an exclusionary practice. With the democratic view of CMC, it would appear that anyone has the liberty to take self-portraits in whatever ways they like and to post these photographs online. This is true, but only to some extent. As the interviews revealed, a number of factors related to impression management do play a role in how self-portraits are taken and made public. Recurrent in the discussions about self-presentation were topics like 'looking pretty', '(not my) real face' and make-up. As described in Section 6.4, some participants stated that the primary concern with self-portraits is beauty and it is apparent that participants self-sanction themselves with regard to what self-portraits to post as part of their impression management strategies, but also for fear of receiving negative comments, even though they rarely do receive any.

As the few girls who were less enthusiastic about self-portraiture stated, they felt that self-portraiture was not for them ('not pretty enough', 'not very suitable for this genre', 'I would rather show you others girls' self-portraits instead of mine'). Their comments underscore the unspoken belief that self-portraits are primarily about appearance, and also lead one to question 'if self-portraiture is only suitable for a certain type of girl'. Of course, some were not keen on posting self-portraits publicly because of privacy concerns, but there were girls who would have liked to post publicly but *chose* not to, almost as if they were ashamed of who they are/were, even though this was not

always clearly spelled out during the interviews. Why? The interviews showed that participants have in their mind an idea of what self-portraits *ought to* look like – what constitutes 'good' self-portraits in the eyes of the imaginary networked publics, and this affects their decision at many stages, from the ways they portray themselves and post self-portraits to their choice of privacy settings. In the cases of sexy self-portraits, it was obvious that there is a 'right' kind of sexiness and a 'wrong' kind, and between them is a delicate line that sits at the intersection of concerns about appropriateness, respectability and aesthetic tastes. Even acts like 'playing ugly' or revealing out-of-character behaviours, which have the potential to reveal the constructed nature of hetero-normative femininity, are carried out with various kinds of negotiation with the norms expected of girls – girls have to be apologetic or offer warnings in advance, one locks their album, or uses editing software to process images.

There is an element of struggle running beneath the lighthearted discussion about how to take 'good' self-portraits, and yet not very many girls were vocal about the difficulties, or even pain, related to not being able to look photogenic in self-portraits. They thought this had more to do with their appearance than with the standard of beauty that they were unconsciously following. 'Good' self-portraits can be defined in terms of various qualities, such as the composition of the photograph, the combination of lighting and angle, etc., but, without me offering a definition of 'good', most participants automatically started discussing 'good' in terms of facial appearance. While this is not surprising, considering that self-portraits most often focus on the face, surely there are other kinds of 'good' self-portraits that are not simply about focusing on the face and looking attractive?

As McRobbie (2009) notes in critiquing post-feminist gender power, the discourse of female individualisation operates, in the guise of women's individual choice, as a 'mechanism of exclusion' that resurrects heteronormative discourses as the dominant ones. In girls' self-portraiture, there is a danger of this being practiced in order to uphold normative expectations of girls and appearance. We have seen how girls use self-portraiture to 'fit in' to the culture in which they are embedded – whether as

interpersonal communication, as self-identity exploration or as a means of becoming an intelligible female subject, but we see less often how they use it to 'break out' of the dominant cultural expectations of what girls should look like. The consequence is that some girls felt discouraged about using self-portraiture as freely as they like as a means of self-expression, or from feeling comfortable sharing their self-portraits as communication. Having said this, I am not denying the existence of a great variety of self-portraits that engage with subjects beyond the normative standard of beauty. However, we see less of these in the study, perhaps because the term 'zìpāi' is loaded with the stereotype of mainstream self-portraits, and therefore those who responded to this term (to participate in the study) were those who identify with this type of self-portraiture. This points to the need for future study to examine self-portraiture as practiced by a wider group of people in broader contexts in order to understand whether the term 'zìpāi' already operates as a means of exclusion upon one's taking-up of this photographic practice.

8.3 Theoretical Contributions of the Study

The thesis employs a mixed method of quantitative content analysis of 2,000 self-portraits of teenagers to understand how they (re)present themselves, and qualitative interviews with girls aged 13-20 to learn about what self-portraiture means to them. The key findings include that self-portraiture is a practice through which girls exercise agency while negotiating the conflicting demands of being a girl. Self-portraiture is about creating a space for fantasy and play, for the negotiation of longings and anxieties, for the management of an array of audiences when various contexts collapse in one, for experiments with different subject positions that girls see in the surrounding world as socially or personally rewarding. It is through these seemingly casual everyday endeavours that girls enhance their self-understanding in their identity exploration.

8.3.1 The (re)presentation of self in computer-mediated communication

The thesis contributes to knowledge on self-presentation, and self-representation in computer-mediated communication. Although self-portraits are a type of self-presentation, the term self-representation is considered more adequate to describe the subject of this study, because self-representation encapsulates the dimension of presentation of self and through the prefix 're' captures also the additional layer of mediation – by cameras and by the SNS –inherent to the practice of self-portraiture online. Also, the term representation implies acting 'on behalf of someone else', which is an important focus of this study – how girls use self-portraits to speak for themselves, to act as self-representations.

While most CMC research focuses on self-(re)presentation with no visual cues, this thesis deals with the visual aspects and demonstrates the use of photographs to present and represent oneself in the online environment. This thesis contributes to a small but growing area of analysis of (re)presentational styles and codes in photographs, particularly in relation to gender-specific ways of representation. It is the first large-scale systematic analysis of online self-portraits in Taiwan. The analysis incorporates Goffman's (1979) analytical framework for analysing gender acts, and the findings confirm that Goffman's framework (with the exception of the utilitarian touch) can be extended from images of commercial production to self-produced images. This suggests that idealised gender stereotypes are more than shortcuts used by advertisers to achieve commercial realism, and offer ways for individuals to organise their self-images. The findings confirm also that, concurrent with studies of gender in the context of CMC, gendered representational styles, or even 'hyper-ritualized gender acts' (Goffman, 1979) are prominent in self-representations online. Although the findings indicate also that self-portraiture enables identity play, this is largely confined to the same broad style of representation. The implication is that, despite the commonly-asserted disembodied nature of CMC, self-portraits 'put the body back' into the online embodiment. Also, because the online space on a SNS is viewed by members of one's existing social network this constrains the extent to which it is possible to engage in 'dramatic' identity play in self-portraiture.

However, although to the onlooker – such as the researcher conducting the content analysis – there is little dramatic or extreme identity play in these self-portraits, this does not mean that smaller-scale forms of identity play and exploration are not performed through self-portraiture. In the practice of self-portraiture, minute details including a slightly altered camera angle, a slightly wider smile, a neckline that is slightly more open, a slightly different facial expression or hand position– can be experienced as an experiment, a novel exploration, as playing with a slightly varied self-image. By listening to participants' thoughts and experiences, this study found that engagement with digital media does allow space and freedom to experiment with identities in settings that teenagers have control over.

Furthermore, the participants revealed thoughtful consideration about the privacy settings of different albums – although some of their reasoning may not be what adults would consider to be safe. This control over privacy allows them to compartmentalise their Album space into 'separate rooms' in which different aspects of self can be presented and represented, depending on the audience for each context. Having space and autonomy is important for teenagers' identity work, and allows them to rehearse and test different possibilities without having to commit them to the corporeal body, and allows these experiments to be shared with confidants through carefully managed privacy settings. From this perspective, then, the question frequently posed in the CMC literature about whether self-presentations are honest statements of identity seems not to matter as much in the case of self-portraiture, because each image presented – whether realised in everyday life or not – represents a part of the girl's identity that is constantly 'under construction'. The empirical analysis not only applied Goffman's dramaturgical approach to the analysis of self-(re)presentation in CMC but also went beyond the conventional division of 'online as front stage' and 'offline as back stage' by showing how the online space can accommodate multiple 'front stages' and 'back stages', allowing us to attend to the complexities of self-(re)presentation online.

Another concern over online self-representation, and digital content creation more broadly, is whether one's visibility in the online realm and the interactivity of Web 2.0 function as technologies of surveillance or even self-discipline. The findings from this study suggest that this concern may be another symptom of media panic: audiences do not play such an important role in shaping girls' making of self-portraits. The participants' experiences revealed that interactions centred around self-portraiture taking place on Wretch Guestbook are not common; the posting of self-portraits is similar to a monologue or one-directional communication. Even when the girls do interact through Wretch Guestbook, it is usually with people in their social networks. The few comments from unknown visitors are likely to be complimentary or 'friending requests', which participants can deal with easily and quickly. Of course, when posting self-portraits, most girls have expectations of an audience response although this may not be acknowledged explicitly. However, this anticipated response is less powerful than the relations with the body-image: those girls who are not confident about their self-image will be more anxious about their self-portraits, while girls who are less concerned about physical attractiveness are similarly less likely to fret over their appearance in self-portraits, whether posted online or not. Participants' practice of self-portraiture on Wretch is mainly about 'me and my social network', rather than about 'me and a world of strangers'.

8.3.2 The use of photographs in interpersonal communication

The thesis draws on work on personal photography, mobile communication and interpersonal communication to shed light on the practice of self-portraiture, which is often understood or dismissed as a narcissistic practice. While narcissism might be part of the reason why people take self-portraits, it does not explain why these self-portraits are then posted on websites such as Wretch, which stress connection and communication with one's social networks. The theory of self-disclosure was first developed in research on interpersonal relations to explore the role of self-related information in face-to-face relationships, and was expanded to analyse social interactions taking place online. It is used less often to examine visual forms of communication that may or may not be

directed at specific relational partners. This thesis builds on the theory of self-disclosure and integrates studies on mobile communication that recognise the role of portable devices (such as camera phones and digital cameras) for sharing experiences and capturing banal moments in life, and studies in personal photography that increasingly recognise the communicative use of photography alongside the traditional mnemonic use. The empirical findings show that the functional perspective of self-disclosure in face-to-face interactions remains useful for understanding why teenagers take and post self-portraits on Wretch. The seemingly individualistic practice of self-portraiture is a one-way form of friendship work in the contemporary digital age because it allows teenagers to occupy a social presence online, offer self-narratives in visual forms, exercise control over social relations, reach out to specific and non-directed others, and remain 'feeling connected' with important others via the sharing of ordinary and extraordinary bits of life.

8.3.3 Self-portraiture, girlhood, and girls' media production

The thesis also contributes to the niche area of girls' media studies and helps to expand the knowledge about how girls construct and negotiate identities and girlhood through the practice of self-portraiture that is especially popular among young women. It shows that different girls associate different meanings to self-portraiture: for some it is about showcasing one's physical attractiveness, for others it is about taking part in a collective peer culture; for some it is practised as a pastime activity, for others it is a serious endeavour; for some it serves as a status update, for others it is about seeing oneself from other's perspectives. But whatever the purpose and meanings for individual participants, it is a way of finding a 'voice' to speak for oneself, to present and represent oneself.

From participants' discussions about managing positive impressions and exploring alternative ways of posing, we can see that self-portraiture is mediated by cultural ideals and norms about girlhood, and the self-portraits are posted and viewed in a commercial context that advocates for girls to perfect a homogenous look of the 'beautiful chick' – effortlessly cute, sexy, slim, and beautiful. The representational styles that girls adopt to

articulate femininity and sexuality, and the criteria used by some girls to assess beauty and sexiness are in line with heteronormative ideals. Some participants invoke the discourse of self-transformation through self-care and improvement, such as beauty practices, to evaluate their selves and their self-portraits, which serves to 'legiti[mize] pleasure in the competitive display of girls' hetero-sexed bodies in a social world devoid of gender politics' (Currie, Kelly, & Pomerantz, 2009, p. 196). Recall the discussion of media effects in Section 1.4, that some may argue that such findings of heteronormative ideals enacted in self-portraits signal some form of media effects, that girls learn about these ideals from the media and then directly replicate them in their self-representations; some may also argue that girls' articulations of sexuality and femininity more broadly operate under a 'technology of sexiness' (Gill, 2007a) that favours the compulsory display of a certain normative body and sexuality.

While these are true to some extent, I disagree with the implicit assumptions of these arguments that seem to deny a girl's agency and dismiss the role she plays in the process of self-representation, as if she is passively being affected by the power of media messages and societal ideals. Because girls, like adults, have doubts and can be critical about what constitutes 'appropriate' femininity. While some participants are more interested than others in pursuing normative beauty ideals, they acknowledge the difficulty of 'getting it right', or finding the right balance. In other words, participants' engagement with self-image and femininity cannot be characterised as total conformity with or resistance to heteronormative ideals; it is in between: a constant negotiation between appearing likeable and being comfortable with who one is or who one wants to be. It may therefore be more fitting, as Subrahmanyam, Smahel, and Greenfield (2006) suggest, to think of a girl's relationship with the media as a 'co-construction processes' in which she undergoes to-and-fro deliberation, practices, experiments, and so on with regard to her self-representation, which constitutes identity work. This conceptualisation is particularly fitting in the context of self-portraiture online because it highlights the interactive, communicative aspects of such practices that are key tenets of CMC. It also attributes cooperative roles to the girls (the actors) and the media (through which self-

representation takes place), rather than assuming power lies disproportionately on the side of media prior to the empirical investigation.

The cute and the sexy prototypes may not be the kind of self-representations of which feminists approve because these prototypes perpetuate an essentialist view of femininities that emphasise certain qualities that are *said* to be feminine. However, we must also pause and ask ourselves are there any 'right' or 'ideal' kinds of self-representation from a feminist point of view? To answer this would require 'defin[ing] uncontroversially what the reality about women is' (van Zoonen, 1994, p. 31), which is impossible because there is no answer to what constitutes the reality of 'true human, male or female identity' (p. 31). Questions about representation lead back to the aims of this research which were to understand what producing their own media content means to girls, framed within feminist and girlhood research that sees media production as having the potential to challenge gender politics.

As the fieldwork progressed, I realised that the girls' agendas were different. None of their self-portraiture work was motivated by feminist ideals or an intention to challenge or subvert heteronormative representations of women. It shows no conscious subversion of gender norms. The participant who was outspoken and critical about gender norms was also striving to achieve an ideal body image and enjoyed looking at the self-portraits of 'beautiful chicks' (Cindy). The participant who was not shy about expressing sexuality in her self-portraits associated her appearance and sexual power with agency. This makes it difficult to assess whether her self-portraiture should be interpreted as subversive or as conforming, or as some awkward mixture of both (Yuki). The participants who were less enthusiastic about self-portraiture (Refi and Jiajia) treated it as self-exploration rather than the social display of potential self-images. Although their self-portraits may not demonstrate conventional femininity, this is not due to a wilful effort to subvert this image, but rather because they place less value on defining themselves according to conventional femininity. In other words, participants were more interested in using self-portraiture for friendship work, identity exploration, romantic relations and memory work than using it as part of a feminist agenda. So, if girls are neither uncritical cultural dupes nor burgeoning feminists, how should we

understand these practices that do not fit easily with either branch of the dichotomy? As Sibielski (2012) argues, the challenge for girlhood scholars now is 'how to read such work outside of liberatory or subversive theoretical models, without denying the agency exercised by the girls who produce it' (p. 94).

We need to be aware of whether we are critiquing the overall cultural climate surrounding girls' self-representation or critiquing girls' self-portraiture practices. Critiquing girls' practices risks reducing the girls to cultural dupes and taking a position of a critical, righteous 'superior' who laments 'why aren't you more like me?' (Duits & van Zoonen, 2009, p. 113). Focusing on culture –for example, the cute culture or the sexy culture – allows us to analyse how power operates, and how it is used by individuals to construct their subjectivities, while at the same time, respecting girls' agency – even if it might not be the kind of transformative agency that challenges heteronormative power structures. We need to acknowledge the value of girls' practices, not for their resistance, conformity or potential value to feminism, but for what they mean to the individual whose life context that might render certain ways of being, or self-presentation more desirable and rewarding than others. Acknowledging these practices does not mean we celebrate them (populism), but that we respect and understand their experiential value to the individual.

As we begin to see more and more media contents on the internet produced by girls, I speculate that this may be the turning point in girls' media studies. All kinds of content are produced, with or without feminist intent. If we focus only on the 'glamorous' cases showing girls consciously resisting normative gender politics, or 'problematic' cases where girls accept or reproduce gender norms, we miss those cases that are neither successful nor problematic, but are engaging in negotiation of their version of 'girlhood'. Therefore, I suggest that research should focus on the 'messier' field that is not easily categorised as feminist or hegemonic, and explore how girls navigate their way through gender norms, what difficulties they encounter, and what makes some more able to exercise agency to their benefit than others. It is believed that a 'girlhood' analysis that could acknowledge girls' agency and understand their struggle

from their own perspectives and contexts has greater potential to connect with them than a perfect grand argument that only serves to alienate the girls we claim to speak for.

8.4   Limitations of the Research and Methodological Reflections

The methodological approach for this research was chosen based on its appropriateness to address the research question, its feasibility in the face of ethical concerns, and my capacity to manage the fieldwork and data analysis. However, it has some limitations.

In the quantitative content analysis, the decision to sample 10 self-portraits from 100 girls and 100 boys was to achieve a balance between a cumbersome sampling procedure and too large a sample size. The drawback was that the non-independent sample prevented inferential statistics. Although a chi-square test was conducted on a different sample – 169 independent self-portraits – the relatively small sample size meant that some traits of interest did not stand out.

The samples of self-portraits in the content analysis included only those from Wretch albums that were available for public viewing, were categorised as self-portrait albums, and contain explicit or implicit references to age (between 12-18). It is unclear whether teenagers who do not refer to their age, who set their albums to private viewing only, and who do not categorise the album as self-portrait fit with the patterns observed in the content analysis. Finally, since all the sample images were accessed only from Wretch, it is not clear whether the inclusion of other photo-sharing sites would have produced the same results due to different user composition and dominant 'culture' of these photo-sharing sites.

In the qualitative study, the research employed the unconventional method of Instant Messaging (IM) interviews rather than face-to-face interviews. It allowed girls' 'voice' about self-portraiture to be heard in their natural setting, and perhaps the anonymity of IM interviews reduced inhibition over sharing personal or intimate issues. However, as Section 3.6 noted, it also reduced my control over the interviewing process, I could not ensure that all participants answered all the questions; the lack of para-

linguistic cues presented challenges in determining the tone and the right pace to proceed with the interviews; not all participants were investigated in the same depth as I would have wanted, which reduced the possibility for comparison among participants.

While the participants' levels of engagement in and attitudes to self-portraiture varied, the sample suffers from self-selection bias. Since parental consent was needed for participation of girls aged under 18, this inevitably meant that parents were aware that their daughters produced and shared digital content online. This might mean that the girls who agreed to participate are those who engage in 'safer' content creation and sharing on the internet. Therefore it is unclear whether underage girls who post self-portraits online without their parents' knowledge might practise self-portraiture in different – perhaps riskier – ways. Also, since the parental consent procedure and participation in the IM interviews required moderately sustained effort from the participants, it is likely that those who participated were more interested in self-portraiture which means their accounts and experiences might be illustrative of avid users rather than those only lukewarm about self-portraiture.

Given the problems related to recruitment, it was not possible to ensure that participants covered all age ranges and socio-economic backgrounds. The final sample was biased toward those from working class backgrounds, and clustered around girls aged 16-19. It is possible that younger girls might ascribe different meanings to self-portraiture, for example, in their use of self-portraiture for social connections and communication, and use it for gender identity work in different ways to those employed by older girls.

8.5   Directions for Future Research

Section 8.3.3 discussed whether the question of democracy versus resistance is the right question since it attends only to outcomes, not the process or the complexities of the negotiation. It invites either/or answers. We need to develop frameworks for understanding girls' media production beyond the polar resistance and conforming positions, and recognise girls' media for their own agenda, rather than seeing these girls

as 'mini-ambassadors' of feminism. Why should girls' media production be judged by whether it resists, challenges or transforms patriarchal structures, simply because it is produced by girls and we have feminist expectations of them? If boys' media production is not examined against how they challenge normative gender politics, why is it fair to expect girls' casual leisure practice to promote feminism and, challenge the dominant culture when girls are also learning about how to fit into the society? Most importantly, girlhood scholars should listen to what girls struggle to navigate girlhood in their daily lives, even though her struggle and the agency she wields does not equate with the feminist definition of transformative agency in gender politics.

The thesis research focused on Taiwanese girls aged 13-20 who post self-portraits on Wretch Album. But how do teenage boys practise self-portraiture, and what does it mean to them? Self-portraiture is practised by both genders in a range of ages, who share their self-portraits on platforms oriented toward different dimensions of self-portraiture, such as appearance in the case of Wretch, sociality in the case of Facebook, or photographic aesthetics in the case of Flickr. Another possible line of enquiry thus would be to examine how adults practise the specific genre of photographic self-portraiture. Furthermore, a cross-cultural comparison of self-portraiture practice would show how culture enables and constrains the possibilities of gender practices. It seems to me that, by studying these alternatives, we could explore the practice of identity work, and how gender boundaries are maintained and challenged in different national and cultural contexts.

A strand of research on 'participatory culture' examines how users take on the dual role of producer and consumer in their use of interactive digital media. This doctoral research set out to study the relation of girls' self-portraits and the media content they consume on a daily basis, but this proved difficult with the methodology chosen. However, this would be an interesting line of enquiry because it would allow us to see how consumption and production feed into each other in the 'circuit of culture', and how identities are explored, constructed, tested, de-constructed and reshaped in the process of production and consumption. Relatedly, girls whose albums are regularly listed on

Wretch front page as 'hot' albums (i.e. high visitor counts) might practise self-portraiture differently from the girls studied in this research. These girls are likely to have a large body of unknown audience as regular followers and they might interact with audiences and take into account audience feedback more in the maintenance and management of their micro-celebrity status on Wretch. I would suggest the concept of mediation might be particularly useful for an investigation of the role of media and the interactive audience in this process, and would complement the focus on individual practices and meanings in this thesis.

This study was conducted before smartphones became widespread. It would be worth 'updating' this study to see how self-portraiture and personal photographic practice has changed with the introduction of mobile camera devices that are even more compact, produce better image quality, and are more versatile (e.g. GPS tagging, photo-editing applications on the phones) than those used at the time of fieldwork.

8.6   Conclusion

This thesis research investigated girls' self-portraiture practices on the SNS Wretch. It relates to hopes and fears about girls' self-representation through digital media production, and examines the role that photographic self-portraiture plays in girls' social relations, identity work and negotiation of femininity. The exploratory content analysis of teenagers' self-portraits shows that most teenagers represent themselves in a gender stereotypical manner, while some adopt non gender-specific styles to represent themselves as friendly, suggesting that teenagers may use ideals about femininity, masculinity and sociality as shortcuts to present themselves in a positive light. The core data generated from qualitative interviewing and observation reveal how girls use camera technologies and the affordance of SNS for visual self-disclosure, which is important for the development of their interpersonal relationships. The thesis argues that self-portraiture is a computer-mediated interpersonal communication that girls use to consolidate and control relationships that generally overlap with their offline relationships. It argues that self-portraiture is about creating a space for autonomy and

experimentation amidst heteronormative expectations of girls that may operate as a means of exclusion, and that in the process of self-portraiture the subject performs and brings into being different subject positions that may not necessarily be realised in the corporeal body, but are equally important for girls' identity work. It concludes that girls' media studies, and girlhood studies in general, need to expand the theoretical framework beyond a subversion and conformity dichotomy in relation to girls' media production, to one that accommodates and recognises ways of doing girlhood that may not be 'politically correct' according to feminist politics, and yet have significance for girls at a personal level. As self-representations continue to be produced in all kinds of media forms and published in various online platforms, it is hoped that this research provides some insights into the media production of girls that may not be spectacular in the sense of being transformative or problematic, but is ordinary yet encompasses complex power struggle that equally deserves scholarly attention.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Content Analysis Coding Protocol

Facial Expression

A. Mouth area expression

1 = Puckered lips/Pouted lips/Tongue sticking out
2 = Licking lips, biting lips in suggestive manner or kissing
3 = Lips parted without smile
4 = Reserved smile:
       Smirk with or without showing teeth (pulling one side of the lips corner up)
       or Faint smile (pulling both sides of lips corner back up+ turning the lips
       down or pressing lips together without showing teeth)
5 = Bright smile or Laughter:
       pulling the lips corner back up
6 = Other than above
7 = No mouth area expression (blank expression)
8 = Not applicable: face not in frame/ too blurry
9 = Pursed lips
10 = Downturned lips
11 = Mouth wide open; grimace with teeth showing

B. Overall facial expression

1. = Cute/Vulnerable/Adorable/Innocent
2 = Cool/Expressionless
3 = Funny/Dramatic
4 = Sexy/Sensual
5 = Others
6 = N/A:
       Face not in frame/ Too blurry/ Face is covered by camera

Hands Positions/Actions

1 = Self touch- Finger to lips
2 = Self touch- Finger to face/neck/head/hair

3 = Self-touch- sexual:
    breasts, pubic area
4 = Soft touch:
    outlining/cradling/caressing/lightly contacting an object or a person
5 = Gesture:
    making various gestures *
6 = Utilitarian touch:
    grasping, holding, manipulating object(s) other than the camera.
7 = Others:

8 = N/A:
    No particular movement/Simply holding the camera/Not in frame
* If 'gestureing' and 'self-touching' co-exist, then code 'self touch'.

Body Posture

1   = Body cant:
        Head, body cants or knee bend
2   = "Space-reducing" poses:
        Standing in-toeing; bending body; snuggling; nestling, crossing legs *
3   = Sexual body language:
        Body posture or body language with sexual implication; emphasise
        curvaceous body **
4   = Body flexing:
        flexing the muscles
5   = Space-occupying:
        includes extended arms or legs outwards
6   = Lying or reclining on bed or floor (without sexual implication)
7   = Intimate activity with others:
        includes kissing, making out, interacting with other(s) in suggestive manner
8   = Others:
        Any poses not listed above
9   = N/A:
        No particular pose/Body not in frame
10   Holding, hugging something

* If 'body cant' and 'space-reducing poses' coexist, then code 'space-reducing'.
** If 'sexual body language' and other pose coexist, then code 'sexual body language'.

Mode of Dress

1 = Everyday outfit:
Casual, none-suggestive, anonymous outfit, including T-shirts, tennis skirts and walking shorts

2 = Demure:
Fully-clothed yet with subtle sexual nuance.

3 = Suggestively clad:
Wearing/Arranging outfits in ways that accentuate sexual attributes (i.e. muscle, breasts, legs, hips, buttocks, lower abdomen, or inner thighs), including open blouses, shirts which expose chest areas or cleavage, mini-skirts, 'short shorts', tight clothing, full-length lingerie, tank-tops, halter-tops, and muscle shirts.

4 = Partially clad:
Clad less or more explicitly than 3

5 = Indiscernible

Revealed Body Areas

1 = Face/Facial features (and clothed bodies)

2 = Women's cleavage or bare shoulders/ Men's clothed chest (and face)

3 = Women's clothed or covered breasts/ Men's bare chest (and face):
Portraying her breasts as covered with hands or clad in bra top/ Portraying his bare chest

4 = Clothed hips/ Clothed pubic area /Bare thighs/Bare lower abdomen

5 = 2+4 or 3+4:
e.g. In swimsuit or underwear

6 = Other than above

Appendix 2: Consent Form for Girls (Age 12-15)

Teenage Girls' Use of and Experience with Social Media
Doctoral research conducted by Yin-han Wang, PhD student,
Department of Media & Communications
London School of Economics and Political Science, UK

Invitation
You are being invited to take part in a research project. Please read the following information carefully and don't hesitate to ask if you have any questions.

Who am I?
My name is Yin-han Wang. I am a 26-year-old Taiwanese girl. I graduated with a BA from the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature at National Taiwan University, and currently I am a doctoral student at the London School of Economics in London, UK.

What is this project about?
This is my doctoral research project. I am very interested in how teen girls like you are using the Internet and, particularly, about how you use social media (such as Wretch, Yahoo! Knowledge+, Instant Messenger, etc) in your everyday life.

What will you do if you take part?
First I will have an interview with you through Instant Messaging (IM) for one hour. We will talk about how you use the internet and social media, and what you think about them. There are no right or wrong answers. I am happy to listen to anything you share with me. In the next 2 months, I will check your Wretch space every now and then and discuss your online activities with you via IM. It is completely up to you when and how many times we meet online to talk. Our IM discussion(s), like all your IM chats with friends, will be automatically recorded by the IM software we use. Our chat history will be particularly useful for me to make sure I remember everything afterwards.

What will I do with the IM history?
Based on my chat history with you and other girls whom I interview, I will write my doctoral thesis about the experiences of Taiwanese girls with social media. No one else – not your friends, parents, and teachers – will ever be able to read the IM history.

Will your real name or screen name be used?
Absolutely not. I will give you a different name/screen name so I can write about your experiences without anyone knowing who you really are. If you mention to me your school's name or other people's names, I will also change them. So, you will stay completely anonymous.

Will what you said be kept confidential?

Yes. I will not tell anyone else about what you told me, not your friends, parents or school teachers. If you tell me something that makes me seriously worry about your safety I will consult my supervisor in London about it. However, I will not do this without discussing with you first.

The findings will be used by me only for the purposes of my academic research (for example, conference, presentations, my PhD thesis and publications in academic journals). If you're interested in reading my finished work, I will be happy to send you a Mandarin summary of the findings when it is completed in 2012.

Will there be any advantages or disadvantages?

There is no physical risk or harm involved. You will not be affected in any way, even if you change your mind later or decide that you don't want to take part or continue with the project. To show my gratitude to you, a gift (worth around NTD 1000) will be offered to you (it will be mailed to you after our interviews).

Got questions?

Please feel free to contact me via my IM inadifferentvoice@msn.com, email me on Y.Wang26@lse.ac.uk or call me on +44-78539-XXXXX (UK mobile).

If you do decide to take part...

Please sign the consent form and ask your parent to sign a copy of parental consent form. There are two ways to return the forms to me: 1) By email: Please email your consent form to me from your contact email, and ask your parent to email the parental consent to me form her/his contact email (an email that I can contact them when needed). 2) By post: Please print and sign the forms, then post them to me at my address in Taiwan _____. Alternatively, you can email or IM your contact address to me. I will post you hardcopies of the child consent form, parental consent form along with return postage. You will then be able to post the two signed consent forms to me.

When I have received both consent forms from you and your parent, we will arrange the time of our 1st interview. Remember, if you change your mind about taking part later, just let me know. It won't matter.

Informed Consent Form

Yes, I want to take part.

I have read the attached document describing the *Adolescent Girls' Use and Experiences with Social Media* project and I am happy to share my experiences and thoughts with the researcher.

I understand that my words with the researcher will be automatically recorded by the IM we use so she can remember what we discuss. I also understand that our IM history will only be read by the researcher, who will not tell other people who I am.

If I feel uncomfortable about some questions or do not want to participate anymore, I am free to end the interview or withdraw from the project at any time.

I know that the findings of this project will be reported in future research publications, conferences, and presentations, and that the researcher will make sure no one reading the findings will recognise me.

There are two copies of this consent form, one copy is for me to keep.

I agree to take part in this study

Name   _____

IM address _____

Signature _____ (please type)

Date   _____

Teenage Girls' Use of and Experience with Social Media
Doctoral research conducted by Yin-han Wang, PhD student,
Department of Media & Communications
London School of Economics and Political Science, UK

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Invitation
You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide it is important for you to understand what the research is about. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

Who am I?
My name is Yin-han Wang. I am a 26-year-old Taiwanese girl. I graduated with a BA from the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature at National Taiwan University, and currently I am a doctoral student at the London School of Economics in London, UK.

What is the objective of this project?
This is my doctoral research project. The purpose of this research is to understand how adolescent girls like you engage with the Internet and, particularly, about how you use social media (such as Wretch, Yahoo! Knowledge+, Instant Messenger, etc) in your everyday life.

What will you do if you take part?
First I will have an interview with you through Instant Messaging (IM) for one hour. We will talk about how you engage with the internet and social media, and what you think about them. There are no right or wrong answers. I am happy to listen to any experiences you'd like to share with me. In the next 2 months, I will check your Wretch space every now and then and discuss your online activities with you via IM. It is completely up to you when and how many times you'd like to be interviewed. Our IM interview(s), like all your IM chats with friends, will be automatically recorded by the IM software we use.

What will I do with the IM history?
Based on my IM interviews with you and other girls whom I interview, I will write my doctoral thesis about the engagement of Taiwanese girls with social media. No one else – not your friends, parents, and teachers – will ever be able to see or read our IM history.

Will your real name or screen name be used?
No. I will keep your real identity anonymous by giving you a fictitious name/screen name in my publication(s) of findings. If you mention to me your school's name or other people's names, I will also change them. So, you will stay completely anonymous.

Will your participation be kept confidential?
Yes. What you say during our discussions will be kept strictly confidential and will not share it with others. If you tell me something that makes me seriously worry about your safety and well-being, I will consult my supervisor in London about it. However, I will not do this without discussing with you first.

The integrated findings of this research will be used by me only for the purposes of my academic research (for example, conference, presentations, my PhD thesis, and publications in academic journals). Mandarin summary of the findings will be available to you upon request when it is completed in 2012.

Will there be any advantages or disadvantages?
There is no physical risk or harm involved. You will not be affected in any way, even if you change your mind later or decide that you don't want to take part or continue with the project. To show my gratitude to you, a gift (worth around NTD 1000) will be offered to you (it will be mailed to you after our interviews).

Have more questions?
Please don't hesitate to contact me via IM inadifferentvoice@msn.com, email me on Y.Wang26@lse.ac.uk or call me on +44-78539-XXXXX (UK mobile).

If you do decide to take part...
Please sign the consent form and ask your parent to sign a copy of parental consent form. There are two ways to return the forms to me: 1) By email: Please email your consent form to me from your contact email, and ask your parent to email the parental consent to me form her/his contact email (an email that I can contact them when needed). 2) By post: Please print and sign the forms, then post them to me at my address in Taiwan _____. Alternatively, you can email or IM your contact address to me. I will post you hardcopies of the child consent form, parental consent form along with return postage. You will then be able to post the two signed consent forms to me.

When I have received both consent forms from you and your parent, we will arrange the time of our 1st interview. Remember, if you change your mind about taking part later, just let me know. It won't matter.

Informed Consent Form

Yes, I want to participate.

I have read the attached document detailing the *Adolescent Girls' Use and Experiences with Social Media* project and I am happy to share my uses, experiences and views with the researcher.

I understand that my interviews will be automatically recorded by the IM software we use for purposes of accuracy and record. I also understand that the IM history will only be read by the researcher, who will not disclose my real identity.

If I feel uncomfortable about some questions or do not want to participate anymore, I am free to end the interview or withdraw from the project at any time.

I know that the findings of this project will be reported in future research publications, conferences, and presentations, and that the researcher will make sure no one reading the findings will recognise me.

There are two copies of the consent form, one copy is for me to keep.

I agree to participate in this study

Name _____
IM address _____
Signature _____ (please type)
Date _____

Appendix 4: Consent Form for Legal Guardian

Teenage Girls' Use of and Experience with Social Media
Doctoral research conducted by Yin-han Wang, PhD student
Department of Media & Communications,
London School of Economics and Political Science, U K

Invitation
I am writing to invite your daughter to take part in a doctoral research project. Before you and she decide, it is important for you to understand the reasons for the research and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

Who am I?
My name is Yin-han Wang. I am a 26-year-old Taiwanese girl. I graduated with a BA from the Department of Foreign Languages and Literature, National Taiwan University, and currently I am a doctoral student at the London School of Economics in London, UK.

What is the objective of this project?
This is my doctoral research project. The purpose of this research is to understand how adolescent girls like your daughter, are using the Internet and social media (such as Youtube, Wretch, Instant Messaging, etc.) in their everyday lives in the context of new media, Web 2.0 and the internet. Similar research in Taiwan, has rarely taken a youth-centred, let alone a young girl-centred perspective to investigate how girls coming of age in the digital age incorporate these media into part of their adolescence experience. The time is ripe for this investigation, not only to understand the cultural and social aspects of girls' experiences with social media, but also to advance media literacy education for youth.

What will she have to do if she agrees to participate?
First, I will interview your daughter for one hour using Instant Messaging (IM). We will talk about how she engages with the internet and social media, and her views on them. In the next 2 months, I will continue to keep in touch with her and discuss her online activities, again via IM. The time and frequency (1-4 of the interview(s) will be at her convenience. Our IM interview(s), like her IM chats with friends, will be automatically recorded (through the IM default setting) by the IM software; the recordings will be used to check my understanding and to act as a record.

Will her participation be kept confidential?
Yes. All information your daughter shares (including IM history) will be kept confidential. If she reveals something that makes me concerned for her safety I will consult my supervisor in London.

Any identifying features (e.g. name, screen name, school name, etc.) will be anonymised when my findings are published. The integrated findings of this research will be used

only by myself for the purposes of my academic research, including conference papers, presentations, my PhD thesis and publications in academic journals. The Mandarin version of the thesis or the relevant sections, will be available to you and your daughter upon request when it is completed (expected 2012).

Will there be any advantages or disadvantages from participation?
There is no physical risk or harm involved in your daughter's participation. A decision not to take part, or a decision to withdraw at any time, will not affect her. To show my gratitude to her, a gift (worth around NTD 1000.) will be offered, to be mailed to her at the end of her participation.

If she does decide to take part...
It must be the joint decision of you and your daughter to decide about participation. If your decision is positive, you must sign the consent form and ask your daughter to sign a copy of child consent form. There are two ways to return the forms to me: 1) by email to me from your contact email, and from your daughter's contact email. 2) By post: please print out and sign the forms and post them to me at my address in Taiwan _____. Alternatively, either of you could email (or IM) your contact address to me and I will post hardcopies of the child consent form, parental consent form with stamped addressed return envelopes for you to return the two signed consent forms to me.

When I have received both consent forms - from you and your daughter - I will arrange a time for our first interview. If she feels uncomfortable about some questions or wants to withdraw from the project at any time, she is free to do so.

Who do you contact for further information?
If you or your daughter has any questions at any time, you can contact me via my IM inadifferentvoice@msn.com, email me on Y.Wang26@lse.ac.uk or call me on +44-78539-XXXXX (UK mobile). If you want to talk to my supervisor for verification or questions, please contact Professor Sonia Livingstone at S.livingstone@lse.ac.uk. Thank you!

<div align="center">

Informed Consent

</div>

Yes, I give my child permission to take part.

By agreeing to allow my child to take part in the research I demonstrate that I have read the document detailing the *Adolescent Girls' Use and Experiences with Social Media* project and that I allow my child to share her uses, experiences and views as invited by the researchers.

I understand that her interviews will be automatically-recorded by the Instant Messaging software through which the interviews take place, for purposes of accuracy and record. I understand also that the interview transcripts/IM logs will only be handled by the researcher, who will abide by high standards of confidentiality.

If, during the course of the interview, my child feels uncomfortable about particular questions discussed, she can refuse to answer them, or ask for the interview to stop. If, during the course of the research, she does not wish to participate any more, she is free to withdraw at any time.

I am aware that the integrated findings of this project will be reported in future research publications, conferences, and presentations, and that steps will be taken by the researcher to ensure my child's anonymity will be secured.

There are two copies of this consent form, one of which I may keep.

I consent to allow my child to participate in this study

Name of child _____   Age _____
Name of parent/guardian _____
Contact (email/phone/address) _____
Signature _____(please type)   Date_____

Appendix 5: Pilot Study Interview Topic Guide

Research Questions: Why do girls practise self-portrait online? How do they make choices as to representation strategies? What does self-portrait on a SNS mean to them?

Briefing

I am a female doctoral student at the London School of Economics in the U.K. My doctoral thesis researches on the self-portrait of Taiwanese adolescent girls on social networking site. This interview is conducted for the sole purpose of my doctoral project, and will not be used for any other purpose. During the interview, I will ask you question about your use of internet, self-portrait and your Wretch Album. Please feel free to share anything you want with me. If there is any question that you'd prefer not to answer, please do not hesitate to let me know right away.

Everything you say in the interview will be confidential, and you will remain anonymous in my write-up. I will also analyse your album photos as part of my research, yet will never use your photo without your consent. You have the right to withdraw from the interview anytime you want without having to explain for yourself. Before we start the interview, do you have any questions that you'd like to ask me?

Interview Questions

General Background information
- How do you like to be called?
- Age; Education Level; Area of Residence; Personality; Pastime.

General Internet Use
- Do you remember when you first used the internet? Under what circumstances?
- Where do you usually use the internet?
- How much time do you spend online a week?
- What do you usually do online?
- What websites do you usually visit?

Experience of using Wretch
- When was the first time you heard about Wretch? What was your first impression of it?
- Why did you decide to use Wretch Album?
- How often do you log onto Wretch? How often do you update information/photos?
- Does your parent(s)/legal guardian know about your Wretch account? If so, has he/she looked at it? Does he/she check from time to time? If not, why not?
- Do you mind if your parent(s)/legal guardian see your Wretch account? Why or why not?
- Have you ever been approached by people you do not know on Wretch Guestbook? How do you deal with them?

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Practice of Self-Portraiture
- What was your impression of self-portraiture when first heard of it?
- When did you start self-portraiture? Why?
- What tools do you use to self-portrait? Is it yours?
- How do you like to represent yourself? What kind of facial expressions, gestures, poses…etc and in what venues do you prefer when self-portraying?
- Can you talk about some of your favourite self-portraits?
- Do you discuss and/or exchange self-portraits with friends?
- What suggestion would you give to a friend who's never done self-portrait before?
- Do you look at other people's SNS pages and/or self-photography? If so, who are they?
- How do you come to decide what photos share?
- Do you pay attention to the visitor counts and comments?

Debriefing
- I have no further questions. Is there anything else you'd like to talk about, before we finish the interview?
- You've shared a lot of interesting experiences. They are all very useful, and I really appreciate your help. If you think of anything else you'd like to share at a later time, please feel free to send me an email or leave an offline message for me.

Appendix 6: Interview Topic Guides

Research Question: What role does self-portraiture play in girls' identity work?

Briefing
I am a female doctoral student at the London School of Economics in the U.K. My doctoral thesis researches on the self-portrait of Taiwanese adolescent girls on social networking site. This interview is conducted for the sole purpose of my doctoral project, and will not be used for any other purpose. During the interview, I will ask you question about your use of internet, self-portrait and your Wretch Album. Please feel free to share anything you want with me. If there is any question that you'd prefer not to answer, please do not hesitate to let me know right away.

Everything you say in the interview will be confidential, and you will remain anonymous in my write-up. I will also analyse your album photos as part of my research, yet will never use your photo without your consent. You have the right to withdraw from the interview anytime you want without having to explain for yourself. Before we start the interview, do you have any questions that you'd like to ask me?

Interview Questions
General Background information
- How do you like to be called? Tell me a little about yourself.
- Education; Family members; Personality; Pastime and hobby.
- What media have you used today?
- What aspects about yourself and your life that you like or dislike?

General Internet Use
- What activities do you usually do online; what websites do you usually visit?
- Do you use any social networking site other than Wretch? If so, why? What do you think about them?

Experience of using Wretch
- Why did you decide to use Wretch Album?
- How often do you log onto Wretch? How often do you update information/photos?
- Do you mind if your parent(s)/legal guardian see your Wretch account? Why or why not?
- Have you ever been approached by people you do not know on Wretch Guestbook? How do you deal with them?

Practice of Self-Portraiture
- When did you start self-portraiture? Why?
- What tools do you use to self-portrait? Is it yours?
- What kind of impression do you want to convey with self-portraits? Can you talk about them in terms of style, facial expressions, gestures, poses…etc?

- Has your style of portraiture changed over time? Has your interest in self-portraiture changed over time?
- How do you select self-portraits to be posted?
- What would you like to express with your self-portraits?
- Do you think there are any differences or sameness between you and self-portraits?
- Can you pick 5 self-portraits that you like from your Wretch Album and discuss why you like them?
- Do you take, discuss and/or exchange self-portraits with friends?
- What about self-portraiture that you like or dislike?
- Who do you consider to be the audience of your self-portraits and Wretch Album?
- Do you look at other people's self-portraits? If so, who are they? What do you think about them? What style of self-portraits do you like?
- Do you pay attention to the visitor counts and comments? What kind of comments do you usually receive on your Wretch Guestbook?
- What do you think about sexy self-portraits? Do you consider taking sexy self-portraits?
- Imagine if Wretch Album were your room, what kind of atmosphere or style do you prefer?

Debriefing
- (If the interview is not finished.) When will you be available for the next interview?
- You've shared a lot of interesting experiences. They are all very useful, and I really appreciate your help. If you think of anything else you'd like to share at a later time, please feel free to send me an email or leave an offline message for me. I will send you the gift to you mailing address soon.

Appendix 7: Questionnaire Distributed at Schools

Teenage girls' use of the internet, online albums and self-portraiture

Hello, I am a doctoral researcher at the London School of Economics, UK, working on my doctoral thesis research. I would like to learn about your use of the internet, online albums and self-portraiture. Your answers to this questionnaire will not be revealed to your teachers or parents, and are only used for my academic research. When you fill out the questionnaire, please read the questions carefully, and try to answer as much as you can. Your response will be helpful for us to understand teenage girls' use of the internet, and make this research more comprehensive. Thank you!

Yin-han Wang

Part 1: Basic information (single-choice)

1. I was born in year ____. I am currently attending grade ___ in:
   ☐high school ☐vocational school.

2. The highest education level of my parents or legal guardian is:
   ☐elementary school ☐middle school ☐high school or vocational school
   ☐university or equivalent ☐graduate school.

3. My family owns ☐no cars ☐one car ☐two cars ☐more than three cars.

4. In a week, I attend after-school classes (such as cram schools, talent classes):
   ☐not at all   ☐1 to 2 days   ☐3 to 4 days   ☐more than 5 days.

5. On a typical weekday, I watch the television for:
   ☐less than an hour   ☐1 to 3 hours   ☐over 3 hours.

Part 2: Internet use (single-choice)

1. I have used the internet for:
   ☐less than one year ☐1 to 2 years   ☐2 to 3 years   ☐over 3 years.

2. Where do I usually use the internet?
   ☐at home   ☐school   ☐friend's place ☐cyber café.

3. Does my family own computer(s) that I can go online with?

☐No   ☐Yes, I share a computer with my family   ☐Yes, I have my own computer.

4. On a typical weekday, how many hours do I use the internet?
   ☐Less than an hour   ☐1 to 3 hours   ☐Over 3 hours.

5. On average, how many hours do I use the internet everyday on weekend?
   ☐Less than an hour   ☐1 to 3 hours   ☐Over 3 hours.

6. About the hours of time I spend online, and the webpages I browse, my parents:
   ☐Regulate both   ☐Regulate the time spent online   ☐Regulate the webpages I browse   ☐Have no regulations.

Part 3: Social Media (single-choice)

1. Do I use any Instant Messaging software?
   ☐No   ☐Yes, I use Yahoo messenger   ☐Yes, I use Windows Messenger
   ☐Yes, I use ____.

2. Have I made any friends online?
   ☐No   ☐Yes, but we've not met in person or talked on the phone
   ☐Yes, we've talked on the phone   ☐Yes, we've met face-to-face.

3. Do I have my own blog now?
   ☐No   ☐Yes, I have had one, but I'm not using it anymore.
   ☐Yes, I use Wretch Blog. ☐Yes, I use Pixnet Blog.   ☐Yes, I use ____.

4. How long have I been using the blog?
   ☐I don't have one.   ☐Less than half a year.   ☐1 to 2 years.
   ☐2 to 3 years. ☐3 to 5 years.

Part 4: Online Albums and Self-Portraiture

1. Do I have my own online album now?
   ☐No   ☐Yes, I have had one, but I'm not using it anymore.
   ☐Yes, I use Wretch Album.   ☐Yes, I use Pixnet Album. ☐Yes, I use ____.

2. How long have I been using the album?
   ☐I don't have one.   ☐Less than 6 months.   ☐1 to 2 years.
   ☐2 to 3 years. ☐3 to 5 years.

3. We often see self-portraits of girls on Wretch, have I posted self-portraits in my online album?
   ☐No   ☐Yes

4. Do I look at other people's self-portraits?
   ☐No   ☐Yes

5. I think online self-portraiture is …. (multiple choice)
   ☐Fun   ☐Boring ☐Novel   ☐Strange ☐Narcissistic
   ☐I don't think anything about it. ☐Others _____

6. What other thoughts do I have about online self-portraiture? Do I like it? (Please feel free to speak your mind!)

7. Finally, if the researcher wants to talk to me, through Instant Messaging, about my thoughts on self-portraiture…

   ☐I am willing to.
   My name is:
   My email address:
   My IM account:

   ☐I am not willing to.

Please check that if you have answered all the questions. Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. :)

Teenage girls' use of the internet, online albums and self-portraiture

Hello, I am a doctoral researcher at the London School of Economics, UK, working on my doctoral thesis research. I would like to learn about your use of the internet, online albums and self-portraiture. Your answers to this questionnaire will only be used for my academic research. In the publication of findings, you will be given a pseudonym and your Wretch account name will not be disclosed. When you fill out the questionnaire, please read the questions carefully, and try to answer as much as you can. Your response will be helpful for us to understand teenage girls' use of the internet, and make this research more comprehensive. Thank you!

Yin-han Wang

Part 1: Basic information (single-choice)

6. I was born in year ____. I am currently attending grade ___ in:
    ☐high school   ☐vocational school.

7. The highest education level of my parents or legal guardian is:
    ☐elementary school ☐middle school ☐high school or vocational school
    ☐university or equivalent   ☐graduate school.

8. My family owns ☐no cars ☐one car   ☐two cars ☐more than three cars.

9. In a week, I attend after-school classes (such as cram schools, talent classes):
    ☐not at all   ☐1 to 2 days   ☐3 to 4 days   ☐more than 5 days.

10. On a typical weekday, I watch the television for:
    ☐less than an hour   ☐1 to 3 hours   ☐over 3 hours.

Part 2: Internet use (single-choice and open-ended)

7. I have used the internet for:
    ☐less than one year   ☐1 to 2 years   ☐2 to 3 years   ☐over 3 years.

8. Where do I usually use the internet?
    ☐at home   ☐school   ☐friend's place ☐cyber café.

9. Does my family own computer(s) that I can go online with？
    ☐No   ☐Yes, I share a computer with my family
    ☐Yes, I have my own computer.

10. On a typical weekday, how many hours do I use the internet?
☐Less than an hour   ☐1 to 3 hours   ☐Over 3 hours.

11. On average, how many hours do I use the internet everyday on weekend?
☐Less than an hour   ☐1 to 3 hours   ☐Over 3 hours.

12. About the hours of time I spend online, and the webpages I browse, my parents:
☐Regulate both   ☐Regulate the time spent online   ☐Regulate the webpages I browse   ☐Have no regulations.

13. What do I usually do when I go online?

14. The websites I usually visit are: (Please list 3 to 5.)

Part 3: Social Media (single-choice and open-ended)

1. Do I use any Instant Messaging software?
☐No   ☐Yes, I use Yahoo messenger   ☐Yes, I use Windows Live Messenger   ☐Yes, I use ____.

2. Have I made any friends online?
☐No   ☐Yes, but we've not met in person or talked on the phone
☐Yes, we've talked on the phone   ☐Yes, we've met face-to-face.

3. When did I start using Wretch Blog? Why did I want to start blogging?

4. When did I start using Wretch Album? Why did I want to use online album?

5. Do I use any social networking sites other than Wretch?

Part 4: Self-portraiture and me (open-ended questions)

1. What is my nickname? What kind of person do my friends say I am?
2. What are my hobbies?
3. What are my favourite magazines, TV programmes, websites or blogs?
4. What are some items that I bought recently?
5. When did I start taking self-portraits? Why did I want to take self-portraits at that time?
6. What are my four favourite self-portraits? Why do I like these? (Please pick from your Wretch albums and paste the links here, or attach the photographs in the email).
7. What kind of impression do I want people to have when they see my self-portraits?

8. What are the stylistic characteristics of the self-portraits I like? (In terms of facial expressions, camera angles, postures, lighting, etc.)
9. Where do I usually take self-portraits?
10. How often do I take self-portraits? Why?
11. If a friend who has never taken self-portraits before asked me for tips on making good self-portraits, what would I say?
12. Does the 'me' in self-portraits look the same as, or different from the everyday me?
13. Do I use editing software to post-process my self-portraits? Why, or why not?
14. If we think of self-portraiture as 'telling a story', what kind of story about me would I like to express through self-portraits?
15. Whom or what objects do I often take self-portraits with?
16. Overall, do I enjoy self-portraiture? Why or why not?
17. When do I not enjoy self-portraiture? Why?
18. Do I enjoy looking at other people's self-portraits? Whose self-portraits of people do I view on a regular basis? (Please list links)
19. Of the girls that I consider pretty, what are their characteristics in terms of personality and appearance?
20. Are there artists or celebrities that I like? Why?
21. On Wretch Album we can often see girls' sexy self-portraits. What are my thoughts about these?
22. Have I ever considered taking sexy self-portraits? Why or why not?
23. What kind of background style or feelings do I like for my Wretch Album?
24. Do I discuss self-portraiture with friends?
25. Who do I imagine to be the visitors of my Wretch Album?
26. Would I want to take self-portraits that cater to the taste of my audience?
27. Have people made positive or negative comments about my self-portraits? How do I feel about these comments?
28. Of the people who leave messages on my Wretch Guestbook, are they mostly people I know or people I don't know?
29. How do I usually respond to friend requests from people I don't know?
30. Do I care about the visitor clicks of my Wretch Album? Why?
31. What do I like or dislike about Wretch?
32. Do my parents know about my Wretch Album? Why or why not?
33. Is there anything else I'd like to add about self-portraiture?
34. What English and Mandarin pseudonym would I like to use in the publication of findings?

Please check that you have answered all the questions. Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire. Please return it to my email address, thank you :)

To thank you for your help, I would like to send you a gift to express my gratitude. If you would like to receive it, please leave your name and address here, thank you.

Appendix 9: Participants' Profiles

Pseudonym	Age	Recruited through	Interview(s)[52]	Profiles
Alicia	18	Snowball sampling	1st: 70 minutes 2nd: 105 minutes	A schoolmate of Faye's; both are studying nursing at a college. Alicia's mother works in a restaurant, and her father is involved with business in China. Her career objective is to be a nurse. Her interests are surfing the internet, shopping, self-portraiture and watching entertainment and variety shows on TV. She has never had a boyfriend and is quite eager to find one. She has used a dating website (AIO), but felt that it would not help her to meet serious men.
Alison	17	School	30 minutes	Alison is from a middle class family. Her parents' highest educational level is university degree. She has her own computer at home, but does not spend too much time online due to parental rules about internet use time. She attends cram school one or two days a week; she spends less than 1 hour online on weekdays, and 1-3 hours on weekends.
Angela	17	School	40 minutes	Angela is in her second year in vocational school, majoring in dance performance, although she is not sure that she wants to make dance a career. Her parents' highest education level is high school or equivalent. She does not attend cram school, and spends more than 3 hours online daily. She shares the computer with her family, although it is in her room. Her main online activities are Facebook, wretch, and internet shopping. Occasionally, she works as a model for a wedding gown rental company.
Aurelia	17	School	1st: 30 minutes 2nd: 20 minutes 3rd: 70 minutes	Aurelia is in her second year in vocational school. She lives with her mother, and five other members of her mother's family. Her mother is a businesswoman and travels frequently for work. Aurelia attends cram schools

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[52] With some exceptions, with are identified, interviews were conducted using Instant Messaging.

				more than 5 times a week, and spends more than 3 hours daily online. She has her own computer, a gift from an uncle to use for schoolwork, which is in her bedroom. She is very close to her mother who has seen her Wretch Album. She registered a Wretch account for her mother. She has a boyfriend of more than a year's standing; he is currently serving in the army.
Bing	14	Wretch	60 minutes (in 2008)	From pilot interview conducted in 2008. Bing is in her second year of middle school. She enjoys using the internet to chat with friends, and has made some friends online. On school days, she spends around 2 hours a day online; on weekends, she spends 5-6 hours online each day. Her parents have seen her Wretch album, but she thinks they have probably forgotten about it.
Brandy	17	School	130 minutes	Brandy is in her second year in vocational school, majoring in e-commerce. She describes herself as 'funny and crazy'. She has her own computer at home and her parents have no rules about internet use. She had closed her Wretch Album the day before our interview because she was too lazy to post photographs. She directed me to an online chatroom called 'dream find land' where she has a profile page and has posted some self-portraits.
Cecia	18	Wretch	Email interview	Cecia describes herself as a rather carefree optimist. She is from a middle class family and attends cram school 1-2 days a week. She has her own computer from which she can access the internet. When online, she mainly browses shopping sites, downloads music and writes blogs. She started blogging at 16, because 'everybody' was doing it. She started posting photographs on Wretch at 17, 'when I've learnt about beauty and dressing, and self-portraiture'. Her parents know about her Wretch because she 'forces them to see her page'. In her leisure time she likes to read 'Popteen' (Japanese fashion magazine) and watch the popular variety show '*KangXi Lai Le*'.
Chelsea	18	Wretch	60 minutes	Chelsea is from a middle class family and is in the second year in an all-girls' high school. She is outgoing and sometimes is described by friends as chatty and noisy. She enjoys shopping, but stressed that she performs well at school. She attends cram school 4 times a week, and enjoys it greatly because she 'gains knowledge'. In our interview, she confided in me about her concerns

				over wanting to break up with her boyfriend, who wanted to have sex with her. The conversation became a counselling session rather than an interview. We could not manage to arrange a follow-up interview.
Cindy	17	School	1st: 70 minutes 2nd: 90 minutes	Cindy is in her second year in vocational school, majoring in cosmetology. Her friends often describe her as having a 'crazy' personality although she thinks that deep down she is quite serious. In her free time, she likes to chat and 'hang out' with friends, or watch TV and use the internet. She particularly enjoys looking at 'beautiful chicks' photographs online, and says she 'spends however much time she has to look at them'. She is not at all confident about her appearance and body, and admitted that wanting to become like the 'beautiful chicks' was sometimes motivation to go on a diet. She is critical of conventional femininity, but at the same time tries to pursue the conventional beauty ideal.
Dana	15	Wretch	90 minutes	Dana is in her first year of vocational school, majoring in mechanical engineering. She is not very interested in the subject, but enjoys school. She describes herself as easygoing and a person who likes to make friends. Apart from Wretch, Facebook and AIO, she has accounts at two other social networking/dating sites, although she is too lazy to carry on managing all these pages. She had to change her IM account because quite a few people were 'bugging' her through her previous IM, which they knew from her profiles on the networking/dating sites.
Daphne	17	Wretch	1st: 160 minutes 2nd: 90 minutes	Daphne is in the second year of a girls' vocational school, majoring in fashion design. She is a member of the school's honour guard, and serves as the school's Public Relations officer. She describes herself as very sociable and enjoys talking to people in her free time. She did not get on with her classmates in middle school, which was an incentive to make friends online through gaming sites, dating sites, social networking sites, and chatrooms. She has experienced unwanted sexual advances in chatrooms and IM. One person threatened to publicise her mobile number, but luckily got the number wrong by one digit, so she blocked his number and ignored him. Her offline social

				relations have improved since she moved to high school, much of which she attributes to her changed personality and feeling more comfortable in an all-girls environment.
Dee	17	School	110 minutes	Dee is in her second year in vocational school, majoring in dance performance. Her parents' highest education qualification is high school or equivalent. She describes herself as an out-going, positive, fun person. She does not attend cram schools, and spends 1-3 hours online daily. She has made friends online but has not physically met or spoken to them.
Eileen	17	School	50 minutes	Eileen is in her second year in vocational school. She describes herself as a 'fan girl' of several young male singers/idols, including the Taiwanese pop singer 'Show Luo', and the Korean boys group 'Super Junior'. She is a regular attender at fan gatherings. She cannot go online everyday because her mother thinks she does not have self-control over how much time she spends online. When she goes online, she downloads pictures, songs and checks news about her favourite idols. She regularly re-posts the news on her Wretch Blog.
Faye	18	Snowball sampling	1st: 60 minutes 2nd: 120 minutes	Faye is the middle school classmate of Mia. She is in her first year at nursing college. Faye is active in making friends online, and uses Facebook, Cyworld (Korean social networking site), 'international dating site' and the Taiwanese dating site AIO. Faye met her boyfriend through AIO, but their four-month relationship has been on-and-off. She is 'always trying to lose weight, but lacks the perseverance'. She learns about makeup through beauty bloggers.
Hailey	17	School	40 minutes	Hailey is an aboriginal from the rural area of Southern Taiwan, and left home to attend vocational school in the city. She is described by friends as an outgoing, humorous person. Her interests are playing sports, and playing the guitar and drums. She aspires to join a police college. She does not attend cram school, and spends more than 3 hours a day watching TV and going online. She loves children and has an album on Wretch of photographs of kids who she considers 'adorable'.
Holly	16	Wretch	1st: 30 minutes 2nd: 20 minutes	Holly is her second year in vocational school, majoring in business management. She describes herself as an outgoing girl who laughs a lot. Her

			3rd: 70 minutes 4th: 40 minutes	interests include watching movies and going to karaoke. Her male idols are a chef (ā jīshī), and a baseball player (ChachaPeng) and Stanley Huang (a hip-hop singer). She does not have female idols, and hates a female singer (Cindy Wang) with a passion for her fake appearance and pretentiousness. The first thing she does online is to check her Wretch—she would spend 'however long' she wants browsing Wretch. She is not confident about herself and feels that she is 'losing value' in the dating market.
Huei	18	School	1st: 105 minutes 2nd: 130 minutes	Huei is in her second year in vocation school. She enjoys singing and eating and is described by friends as having a good sense of humour. She is very close to her mother because both are 'talkative and funny'. She does not particularly enjoy studying at the moment, but plans to major in college in language or design. Her family owns a small shop, and her mother does some occasional part-time work to make extra money. She regularly follows Stella's Wretch because she admires Stella's style and singing talent.
Jessica	16	School	1st: 90 minutes 2nd: 100 minutes	Jessica is in her second year in vocational school, and hopes to major in English in college. She and Huei are best friends. Her parents' highest educational level is high school. She describes herself as an 'outgoing, optimistic, spoilt person'. She is not keen on using SNS in general or making online friends. She interacts only with people she knows on the internet. When strangers approach her on Wretch, she is polite and avoids answering questions that would reveal her identity.
Jiajia	17	Personal network	Face-to-face interviews 1st: 15 minutes 2nd: 40 minutes	Jiajia is in her final year in vocational school, majoring in graphic design. She was preparing for her college entry exam. She used to go online for more than 3 hours a day, but is now attending cram school 3-4 days per week, and spends much less time online. She has not updated her Wretch Album for some time, although she continues to respond to messages on her Guestbook. She takes self-portraits at home when she is bored, but no longer uploads them. When she is using the internet, her parents will come into her room every so often just to keep a check on what she is doing. She thinks that her father sometimes checks her Wretch account at his office to make sure that

				she does not post 'random stuff' online.
Jie	15	Personal network	1st: 70 minutes 2nd: 80 minutes	Jie is in her first year in high school. She thinks she wants to be a beautician in the future. Her father is a balloon artist, and her mother is dead. She describes herself as an extrovert. Online she spends most time on IM, Wretch and Facebook where she interacts with friends, learns about their life updates, and plays games.
Jo	16	Wretch	90 minutes	Jo is in her first year in a private high school. Her class is part of an international college that prepares students for higher education (university) in North America. She enjoys playing billiards in her free time. At the time of interview, she had just opened a new Wretch account because of 'relationship problem'. She was reserved in the interview, and her responses were generally succinct.
Layla	16	Wretch	1st: 30 minutes 2nd: 120 minutes	Layla is in her first year in vocational school, majoring in culinary management. She is extremely sociable and frequently talks to friends on the phone for hours. She publicises her mobile phone number on her Wretch 'because it's easier for friends to find me', but as a result, she often receives unwanted calls from strangers. She loves playing all kinds of ball games. She is trying to lose weight by exercising and dieting. She has two much older brothers, and the second one (9 years older) sometimes checks Layla's Wretch in order to know what she is up to.
Ling	19	Ptt.cc	180 minutes	Ling is in her third year in university, majoring in Law. Her career objective is to be a public prosecutor. She has two younger siblings. She describes herself as a 'slow-to-warm-up' person. She is very interested in fashion and beauty, and regularly reads Japanese fashion magazines and follows Taiwanese beauty bloggers. She has been with her boyfriend for a year, but prefers to keep the relationship secret for fear that her parents might become overly-worried about it.
Lizzy	18	Wretch	1st: 80 minutes (in 2008) 2nd: 60 minutes	Lizzy is in her fourth year in a nursing school. She was first interviewed in the pilot study in 2008, and re-interviewed for the formal fieldwork in 2010. She started playing online game at the age of 7, and throughout elementary school

			(in 2010) 3rd: 110 minutes (in 2010)	she used IM and chat rooms and made an 'online husband' (boy/male partner with whom you play games). Her time online has gradually decreased since she went to college, partly because she is more serious about her study, and partly because she has a part time job in order to help finance herself.
Lucy	17	Wretch	1st: 25 minutes 2nd: 25 minutes 3rd: 80 minutes	Lucy is in her last year in vocational school, majoring in childcare. She describes herself as 'idiotic and has no good image'. Her father is a car technician, and her step-mother is a beautician. Her parents also own a shop selling lottery tickets, and the family computer is in the shop. She can only use the computer in the evening when the shop is open. Her parents only have rules on her Internet time use, although when in a good mood they do not interfere. Lucy's parents are very strict with her, and forbid her to hang around even with female friends. They expect her to 'do what girls ought to do, such as doing house chores and be a role model for her younger brother', who Lucy describes as a 'pervert'. Lucy has a boyfriend who is four years older than herself, and she sometimes sneaks out late at night to spend time with him. She looks forward to going to college so she can get away from her family.
Mia	18	Wretch	1st: 90 minutes 2nd: 60 minutes 3rd: 70 minutes	Mia is in her third year in high school. She had to drop out school for a year because of a rare disease, which limits her mobility. She can type only with one hand. Despite her problems, Mia is optimistic and takes her study very serious. Her dream is to enter the top university in Taiwan. In her free time, she likes to learn about fashion through TV and the internet.
Milk	18	Wretch	60 minutes (in 2008)	From pilot interview conducted in 2008. Milk is in her first year in vocational school. She is described by friends as fun-loving and humorous person. She enjoys surfing the internet, watching TV, and 'admiring myself in the mirror' for several minutes everyday.
Millie	18	Wretch	1st: 80 minutes 2nd: 60 minutes 3rd: 25 minutes	Millie has several nicknames: Little Princess, Lollipop, and Micky Mouse. She is in her final year in vocational school. She works part-time at a hair salon, and has been accepted to study cosmetics science in a college that is some distance from home. Her family shares two computers that are in the

				'computer room' at home. Her parents have rules about Internet time use, but she is able to use it for as long as she wants – 3-4 hours on weekdays, and whole days on weekends, although she and her brothers (17 and 14) sometimes have to take turns. She does not get along well with her family – especially the youngest brother – and is looking forward to leaving home for college. She has a boyfriend who is the same age as her, whom she met through her Wretch (he left messages on her Guestbook).
Pinpin	13	School	1st: 60 minutes 2nd: 30 minutes 3rd: 30 minutes	Pinpin is the youngest participant. Her parents' highest educational qualification is high school or equivalent. Pinpin is keen to make new friends and stay in touch with existing ones. Her Wretch Blog lists embed links to her Facebook, Plurk (a microblogging site), Yahoo IM, and class blogs of all the classes in her school year. When online, she mainly uses her Facebook, Wretch and Yahoo IM. In her IM communication with me, she often did not select the right characters in the Chinese input system, making it quite difficult to read her sentences. She attends cram school 3-4 days a week. On weekdays, she spends more than 3 hours online daily. On weekends, she spends more than 5 hours online each day. She usually uses the internet at home, where her family shares two computers that are in the living room. Her family registered a Wretch account for her when she was 7, because she was curious about it, although she did not start blogging until age 11.
Qian	19	Ptt.cc	1st: 50 minutes 2nd: 60 minutes 3rd: 90 minutes	Qian is in her third year in a top-tier university, majoring in land economics. She is from a working-class family. Her dreams are to open a clothes shop or a patisserie, and to get married, but is realistic and is considering studying for a postgraduate degree and looking for a stable job afterwards. She has been with her boyfriend for nearly a year, but does not publicise the relationship on Wretch.
Refi	18	Personal network	Face-to-face interview: 180 minutes	Refi just graduated from high school and has been accepted to study graphic design in university. Her mother is a housewife and father works in a small company. She is an avid fan of indie music. In her free time she enjoys handicrafts and is having some craft lessons. She and Jiajia are best friends.

Rosie	19	Ptt.cc	120 minutes	Rosie attends a top-tier university and majors in political science. Her career objective is to be a civil servant. She plays base in four student bands. She describes herself as a person who 'writes the emotions on the face'. She is very conscious of her body image and is 'often trying to lose weight'. She has had double-eyelid cosmetic surgery and is considering cosmetic surgery on her nose in the next term or so.
Stella	19	Snowball sampling	1st: 180 minutes 2nd: 30 minutes	Stella is an acquaintance of Huei. She is in her first year in college, majoring in business Japanese. Her father is in the electronics business and trades with Japan and she sees herself joining his business when she graduates. She describes herself as unconfident and pessimistic. Her interests are singing and dancing. She keeps up to date with the latest fashion and beauty trends through magazines and beauty blogs.
Sunny	15	Wretch	60 minutes	Sunny is just entering her first year in high school. She describes herself as an 'outgoing, hyper' person. She enjoys reading English novels or magazines in her free time (she cited an English learning magazine). She is interested in Mandarin pop music, and cartoon such as Spongebob. She is studious, and had refused to be interviewed several times in the past because she was studying.
Tia	16	Wretch	1st: 90 minutes 2nd: 120 minutes	Tia is in her second year in high school. She and Yaya are both Public Relations officers at the same hip-hop club at school. Like Yaya, Tia also has several experiences of modelling for amateur photographers.
Vicky	18	Wretch	1st: 90 minutes 2nd: 70 minutes	Vicky is from a working-class family and is in her second year in high school. She describes herself as sociable, and posts her IM, email and mobile number on her Wretch. Her boyfriend recently died in a car accident, which caused her to become depressed. Following his death, Vicky unlocked an album that contains intimate photographs of her and her deceased boyfriend. She sometimes does modelling work for amateur photographers, sometimes in private places such as motels (in the company of a female friend). She is one of the few participants who posts sexually suggestive photographs. Her experience using Wretch is not entirely positive: Some people gossip about

				her photographs. Perhaps because of her good looks, her photographs on Wretch have been 'stolen' by someone who attempted to pose as her on a different Wretch account.
Vivi	17	Wretch	30 minutes	Vivi is in her third year in high school. She cannot decide whether to study interior design or foreign languages at university. She started using Wretch at the age of 14, with a friend, under one account, but they later applied for individual accounts in order to have more privacy. Her idol is a female model from Hong Kong called 'Angela Baby'.
Yaya	16	Wretch	1st: 30 minutes 2nd: 30 minutes 3rd: 40 minutes	Yaya is in her first year in high school. She loves dancing and is Public Relations officer in the hip-hop club at school. She has several experiences of modelling for amateur photographers.
Yuan	16	Wretch	1st: 30 minutes 2nd: 60 minutes 3rd: 30 minutes 4th: 90 minutes	Yuan is in her first year in high school. She has never met her biological father, and left her mother and abusive stepfather at the age of 14 to go to live with a cousin, who is a single mother with a 2-year-old girl. She initially had to earn her living by taking part-time work in middle school, but now her cousin pays for her high school. Having been through difficult family relationships and experienced a tough life, she really appreciates simply being a student.
Yuki	20	Ptt.cc	70 minutes	Yuki is in her third year in university. She is outspoken person and enjoys outdoor activities such as surfing, dancing and golf. She is from a well-off family and is the youngest child. She has two Wretch accounts but had stopped using one of them because her ex-boyfriend stalked her on Wretch. She described herself as a wilful person which has had a negative effect in the past on her interpersonal relationships.
Yvonne	16	School	30 minutes	Yvonne is in her first year in vocational school, majoring in e-commerce. She tried self-portraiture when she was 13, but quickly stopped the practice because she found it 'awkward and meaningless'. Her Wretch account has since been deactivated, although she still browses people' self-portraits online.

Appendix 10: Coding Frame for the Analysis of Interviews

These are the codes resulted from the three-stage coding procedure as described in Section 3.4.5. In NVivo, 'sources' refer to the source documents – in this case, transcripts – imported to NVivo. 'References' refer to the source contents that are coded as related to the node. The 'node' here is equivalent to a 'theme', which collects all the references that are coded as related to a common theme. For instance, the node (theme) 'authenticity' is referred to in four different sources (transcripts), and it is mentioned for five times in these four sources. The 'tree nodes' organise nodes in hierarchy—the top node (parent node) is the most general, umbrella theme, and the child notes are the sub-themes or relevant themes.

A. Free nodes

Name	Sources	References
About oneself	6	9
Agency	2	2
Authenticity	4	5
Becoming somebody	8	8
Changes along the way	19	22
Confidence	13	16
Corporeal capital	2	4
Criteria for judging the photos	9	10
Femininity	6	6
Gender identity	6	6
Impression management	47	85
Makeup	12	19
Meanings of self-portraiture	12	18
Memory work	12	21
Narcissistic	5	5
Personal brand	2	3
Play	14	15
Pleasure	4	4
Polaroid	1	1
Post-processing	12	13
Privacy	27	33
Self-disclosure	2	2
Sense of mastery	4	4
Sexuality	25	37
Statement of self	5	6
Storytelling	29	47
Style of self-portraiture	42	80
Venue (of self-portraiture)	10	14
When self-portraiture	19	21

Name	Sources	References
Why portray the self	38	55
Visitor counts (rén qì)	22	25
Modelling for photographers (wài pāi)	4	10
Beautiful chick (zhèng mèi)	7	8
Bare look (sù yán)	3	3

B. **Tree nodes**

Name		Sources	References
Audience		25	34
	Comments	23	37
	Imagined audience	8	8
	Real audience	18	21
Femininity		26	42
	Body image	5	5
	Gender bending	1	1
	Gender scripts	1	1
	Standards of beauty	5	12
Internet use		6	9
	Activities online	9	14
	Online contacts	5	7
	Social media	6	11
	Time spent online	1	1
Photographic subject		0	0
	Boyfriend	6	6
	Family	5	6
	Friends	6	6
	Objects	3	3
	Scenery	1	1
	School	3	3
	Self	2	2
Social communication		9	16
	Gift-exchange	6	9
	Maintaining friendship	11	17
	Memory work	6	9
	Reiteration of party	4	6
	Reward for participation	1	1
	Sense of belonging	5	7
	Status update	12	20
Tools of portraiture		0	0
	Camera phone	23	28
	Digital camera	17	19
Use of photographs		1	1

Name		Sources	References
	Collection	7	14
	Delete photographs	15	23
	Old photographs	17	31
	Organisation	8	13
Wretch		3	3
	Albums browsing	2	3
	Opinion	8	11
	Stranger contacts	18	18
Wretch Album		2	2
	Album background	27	47
	Album cover	7	9
	Close album	3	5
	Privacy settings	24	41
	Update frequency	18	25
	Using Wretch since	31	35
	Visitors	19	29
	Why share photographs	12	20
	Why use Wretch	18	29
	Wretch overall style	19	21