

Me, my selfie and I

by Mark Dixon

I never liked selfies, neither taking them, nor seeing them being taken, nor receiving them.

The true vanity of human beings is exposed by the pictures they take – it has become all about me, myself and I. Or rather: me, my selfie and I. Indeed, a selfie should really be called a **selfishie**.

Fed up with this increasingly selfish environment in Europe, I took a trip to Shanghai. There I discovered the selfie has been taken to further extremes. What is a disease in Europe has become an epidemic in China.

No one at all is taking pictures of others. The smartphone hardly needs the button that switches from front to back lens – it should just point inwards.

I went to a cafe. Three young women sat down for tea. Not a word passed between them. They ordered their cakes and started communicating on their smartphones. Each was taking **herselfies**. Not a single picture of one another, and no shame whatsoever.

They then started taking pictures of the cakes – but their own cakes, not each others'. They were taking **food selfies**. These were then posted on WeChat, their version of WhatsApp. Not a word passed between their lips, but **herselfies** and **itselfies** were flying around the internet.

A simple photograph of someone else has become a collector's item. We now need a new word for it, the **unselfie** – because what was formerly normal has become a deviate form of the new standard. It's a sad day indeed when society's behaviour forces language to be turned inside out like the lens of a camera.

Things got worse. I was soon sitting around a dinner table when a Chinese friend opposite held up her smartphone to take a picture. In turn, I put my arm around my neighbour and pulled her closer. Only then did we notice that the people on the other side were also pulling closer.

"Why on earth are you posing?" the photographer asked.

"We're taking a selfie!"

It was in that moment that I realised there's one thing more vain than posing for your own selfie, and that is posing for a **someoneelse**.

Stung with embarrassment, I hit back: "It seems you've forgotten how to take a **selflessie**." But, because she was in fact taking an **ourselfie**, I wasn't on the strongest ground.

WeChat seems to be the only way people communicate now in Shanghai – they don't look at each other, don't talk to each other, and don't even phone each other. I've been a late-adopter too often lately, so I signed up for WeChat. The language is often pictorial and if you join friends into a group anything someone posts gets broadcast to the rest. I finally wrote back to the whole gang, "Guys, please, I really can't look at one more **yourselfie** today."

Indeed, the problem is **selfie-perpetuating** because someone posts her **herselfie** in a competitive sort of way feeling she's the prettiest in the land – no doubt with a round of **selfie-applause** – only to find her 'friend' has replied within a nanosecond with an image prettier than the last, which of course is interpreted as nothing less than throwing down the gauntlet.

I even received a selfie which a woman had taken of her face in the mirror, having had to turn the lens inside out to its old-fashioned position, probably for the first time in her life. I call this type of photo a **selfie-redundant**, even though I realise it's an adjective.

Selfies also create confusion in the ability of human beings to recognise each other. There are so many **unlikeherselfies** out there that I wonder if the cosmetics industry is behind the trend, and if it's not make-up that momentarily makes a person look like her **unlikeherselfie** then it's probably the **angle selfie** technique. Some images are totally **selfie-contradictory**. My complaint is not just that people are having these virtual relationships but that, if they ever meet, they probably won't recognise each other.

Selfies even confuse the photographer. The distortion of reality caused by the combined deployment of **unlikeherselfies** and **angle selfies** can result in a case of **selfie surprise** when you're so used to the way your selfies look that one day you look in the mirror and think there's a stranger in your bathroom.

The recent change in the one-child policy may reduce the level of selfishness in the next generation in China, but for now the selfie looks set to stay.

Not everyone taking a selfie is equally to blame, but to understand the moral hierarchy it's necessary to dip into the psychology of selfies.

Some know how ridiculous they look when they take a photo of themselves – these are the **selfie-aware**. They are **selfie-conscious** or even exhibit **selfie-doubt**. These are the ones I most respect, or, at least, least disrespect. They have **selfie-control** and so manage to hang onto a modicum of **selfie-respect**.

By contrast there are those who are totally **selfie-assured**, **selfie-satisfied** and **selfie-important**. They exude **selfie-confidence**, **selfie-belief**, and **selfie-esteem**, and have far too much **selfie-worth** for their own good.

Then there are those who use selfies as a tool for **selfie-promotion** and **selfie-advancement**. They're usually in **selfie-denial**, **selfie-delusion** and **selfie-deceit** about their own unattractiveness and I find myself wanting to tell them, "Just keep your selfies to yourself."

Some are so **selfie-destructive** about what they post that it becomes an act of **selfie-sacrifice**, but who's got the guts to tell them the truth? And if anyone does, they'd just bury themselves in **selfie-pity** as they contemplate the images they've broadcast wonder how that has helped their shallow lives.

Then there are those who get **selfie-help**. They take pictures of themselves for only personal consumption, and it does seem to make them feel better. Granted this is **selfie-indulgent** and **selfie-centred** but I do respect them at least for being **selfie-sufficient**. True, these people don't force their selfies on others, but they are in fact being narcissistic on top of being vain.

Finally comes my favourite category, the **selfie-deprecating**. At least these have a sense of humour as they try to take bad photographs of themselves and then broadcast them to their friends. I need to meet more people like them.

In a state of total **selfie shock** from this **selfie-regulatory system** which clearly isn't working, I returned to Europe, relieved to be out of 'selfie city' and hoping I would never hear the s-word again.

Walking down the street in London, WeChat kicked in on my iPhone. My new virtual world was still with me, chatting away, sharing images, and for a moment I almost forgot where I was.

"Are you back in London?" someone asked.

It seemed so natural to do what I then did. I pressed the little plus sign beside the reply box, clicked on the camera symbol, flipped the lens towards myself standing in a London street, and two clicks later I had answered the question with a thousand words. I had in that instant taken and broadcast my first selfie.

And, it felt...

...so, so good!