

# Expressing the Self in selfies

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# Background

- How young people in the 21<sup>st</sup> century understand and make use of different locations, primarily online
- Virtual communities become arenas for
  - consuming, producing and discussing literature (Manderstedt & Palo, 2009)
  - discussing and negotiating themes that are important for identity formation such as gender and sexuality (Palo & Manderstedt, 2011).

# Social media

- Learning opportunities
- Interaction with others
- Development of an understanding of spatiality

But can also entail  
emotional, physical and existential risks, in  
particular for young people (UNICEF, 2011, UK  
Council for Child internet Safety, 2012)

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# The Swedish curricula from 2011

- L1 teaching includes multimodal texts and non-Swedish texts
- The teaching of literature must address the learning potentials in different types of texts, including interactive texts
- The concept of literature may comprise a broader concept of text
  - i.e. social media must be addressed

# Literature is not only for consumption, but also to be produced



- Key concept: *Prosumers*
- Fan fiction
- Self-writing

”Wohoo! So much fun on new years eve! =) at *Luleå university of Technology*”. (Facebook 31/12, 2012)



## Method and material

- Mixed method drawing on netnography and close reading
- 112 public profile pictures from Facebook (often found in blogs and Instagram as well)
- Pictures collected in public Facebook groups with at least 2000 members
- Teenagers and young adults from all over the world
- 50 % boys and 50 % girls
- Two pictures from each Facebook user
- The comments on those pictures

## The selfie as a literary text

- Explore the selfie as partly fiction

Construction and re-negotiation of the self

Contribute to a text archive



# Interdisciplinary approach

- Intersectionality
- Semiotics
- Textual analysis

# Results I: Transformation

(Sorry, no picture can be published, due to copyright.)

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Description: Young adult female, in front of bathroom mirror.  $\frac{3}{4}$  shot. Dressed in black tank top and pistacchio green tight skirt. Pretty. Slightly chubby.

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Approximatively 150 posts in conjunction with the two pictures (i.e. this picture and the next). Between 30 and 40 different names or pseudonyms of people posting comments and images (cf. The Toy Story image).

...

“M encanta ese color pistache”

...

“Solo quiero que sepas cuanto te amo en realida Amor. Tu me estas demostrando otro lado tuyo que nunca avia conosido

...

“Don't be erasing my fucking comments”

...



“Ay nos vemos Facebook Ya callo Tierra”

...

“Ya mejor no te pongo comentarios”

“Y yo mejpr ya borro mi facebook  
porque nadie me entiende enserio!”

...

“I LOVE YOU hate YOU and MISS  
YOU baby”

...

“Jajajaj! Calmateeee ya casate pues”

...

“My life is urs Mami. Hey I got SO  
fucked up last night . But FTW”

“Y de que sirvio? Que te pusieras fucked  
up eh”

“Disen q tomando se olvidan las penas.  
Pero como yo no tengo alcol tube que tu  
ya saves Mami.”

...

(Sorry, no picture can be published, due to copyright.)

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Description: Young adult female, ¾ shot bird’s-eye shot, dressed in tight-fitting workout outfit. Pretty. Slim, toned body.

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This picture and the previous one tell the story of a transformation. Visibly, a physical, due to exercise. Reading: A young female in charge of her own life. No more insults (ex-boyfriends?). More respectful comments.

“No cabe duda eres hermosa”

...

“acuértese de aser mucho ejercicio xla noche corazón” ... “Ehhh???” ...

“Gran cambio (...) felicidades con tanto esfuerzo de ejercicios y dietas lo as logrado aún q una mujer es bella gordita oh flaquita oh más o menos el ejercicio es bueno por salud siéntete orgullosa de ty misma Nitzy me alegro saludes cuídate mucho”

...

“I'm coming nephew” ... “what was that?”

...

“gracias jejeje! Ya ves tanto esfuerzo que hace uno.”

# Metamorphosis

(Sorry, no picture can be published, due to copyright.)

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Description: Young adult female. Close-up photo. Focus on hair, eyes, and mouth. Lips slightly puckered (duckface, but not extremely so). Black and white photo.

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In total, eleven different people posting comments. The two pictures and the comments tell the story of a metamorphosis, from child to attractive woman.

“Can't believe how grown up u are now just remember u as a little toddler”

“Haha time fly's way to quick personally I'd like it to slow down haha, you been alright though”

“ ... just remember u so tiny wiv ur blonde hair ha ha yh I'm good thanks babe”

“Haha I know how I miss my blonde hair”

...

“ Thanks for the nomination girls, now its yours turn...”

# Kaleidoscopic narration

(Sorry, no picture can be published, due to copyright.)

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Description: Photo montage showing a young adult male. The first part of the montage shows him dressed in a hoodie sweeter, with the hood up, taking the selfie in a lift. The second part of the montage shows him in the same location but this time dressed in a suit, shirt and tie.

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In total nine posts in conjunction with the two pictures. Five people are posting comments. The pictures and comments keep change the story conveyed.

”Mi sembri superman prima di cambiar si in ascensore!!!!”

...

”pero' mi occupo dei mercati internazionali”

” Dott. Jekil & Mister Hide!!”

” indeed my friend! ”

” Ironmarjuol  
The thief with the passion for the iron”

” LOL!!! Royalties subito!!! :DDD”

...

(Sorry, no picture can be published, due to copyright.)

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Description: Photo showing the young adult male. Close-up photo. Sunglasses, baseball cap, blue t-shirt and backpack. In the background, greenish water, a modern high-rise building, and, even further back, building cranes. Sunshine.

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No comments.

## Results II: The main categories

«To girl oneself» (51 pictures)

«To boy oneself» (41 pictures)

«To muscle oneself» (13 pictures)

«To perform a lifestyle» (49 pictures)



## «To girl oneself» (ef. Nilsson, 2013)

(Sorry, picture removed, due to copyright)

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Description: Close-up of young adult female. Long hair, combed to frame her face. Focus on eyes, mouth, throat and cleavage.

Dressed in a sleeveless, patterned dress or top with a deep V-neck cut.

Smiles. Black and white photo.

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(Sorry, picture removed, due to copyright)

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Description: 3/4 shot of young adult female. Photo taken in the bathroom. Long hair, combed to frame her face. Smiling into the mobile phone. White teeth. Dressed in turquoise tank top and faded jeans. Posing slightly sway-backed.

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(Sorry, picture removed, due to copyright)

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Description: A young adult female. Close-up, slight bird's-eye shot. Dressed in black headscarf, black turtleneck sweater and a taupe, long-sleeve cardigan. Made up. Smiles into the camera. No bare skin exposed, except for face.

## «To boy oneself»

(Sorry, picture removed, due to copyright)

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Description: Young adult male.  $\frac{3}{4}$  shot, bird's-eye shot. Sunglasses, but eyes visible. Dressed in light shirt and black trousers. Shirt open showing some torso. No smile.

(Sorry, picture removed, due to copyright)

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Description: Young adult male. Medium shot, bird's-eye shot. Tilted head = pointy chin, pointing downwards. Dressed in long-sleeve dark coloured t-shirt, open at the neck, showing some torso.. Posing with left arm behind his head. No smile. Black and white photo. Soft filter.

(Sorry, picture removed, due to copyright)

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Description: Young male. Visibly in his early teens., possibly younger. Medium shot. Camera visibly directly above the subject, who is lying down with the hem of his white T-shirt pulled up and stuffed into his mouth. Thus, his torso and left nipple is bared. To the right of his head, a cushion and some empty space. No smile, but looks into the camera lens.

(Sorry, picture removed, due to copyright)

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Description: Young adult male. Full shot, bird's-eye shot. The young man is holding up the camera, high above his head and looks into the camera lens. Dressed in a long-sleeve dark coloured shirt, dark trousers and flip-flops. The photo is taken in either a shoeshop selling ladies' shoes, or in a closet full of ladies' shoes. Almost smiling. Black and white photo. Soft filter.

## «To muscle oneself»

(Sorry, picture removed, due to copyright)

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Description: Young adult male.  $\frac{3}{4}$  shot, eye-level camera angle. The subject sits on a workout bench in the gym, arms crossed, revealing muscular arms. Dressed in dark baseball cap, dark coloured T-shirt and dark sweatpants. Trimmed beard. Looks into his camera. No smile.

(Sorry, picture removed, due to copyright)

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Description: Young adult male. Medium shot, eye-level camera angle. The subject is dressed in a grey hoodie sweatshirt with a logo, revealing muscular arms. Hood up. Looks into his camera. Most of his face is shadowed. No smile.

(Sorry, picture removed, due to copyright)

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Description: Young adult female.  $\frac{3}{4}$  shot, eye-level angle. In the gym. Dressed in short-sleeve black t-shirt with logo on the right side. Blue training pants with Sweden logo (country name and three crowns) in yellow. Well-toned arm muscles. Long hair in ponytail. Looks into the mobile phone. No smile.

# «To perform a lifestyle» (cf. Butler, 2006[1999], to perform gender)

(Sorry, picture removed, due to copyright)

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Description: Young adult male.  $\frac{3}{4}$  shot, eye-level camera angle. Slight blur, probably intended. The selfie is a reflection in a shop window, featuring the text The Liberation of Art. Dressed in long-sleeve dark sweater, a white T-shirt underneath, and dark trousers. Trimmed beard.

Sorry, picture removed, due to copyright)

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Description: Young adult male. Medium shot, slight low angle shot. Slight blur, probably not intended. Long hair framing his face. Smiling. Dressed in short-sleeve, dark T-shirt with illegible logo, possibly the name of a rock band. Holding a CD in his right hand. Two posters in the background, seemingly featuring rock band musicians.

(Sorry, picture removed, due to copyright)

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Description: Young adult female and child. Circular photo on black background. The photo shows the head of the woman and her left shoulder close-up, as well as and a medium shot of the child, who is naked and has got wet hair. The female, wearing a black tank top, sticks out her tongue. The child smiles at the camera.



## Conclusion

- Making use of the learning potentials in text archives where young people make contributions
- Reading and interpret the material
  - context and cultural framework
  - as non-fiction, fiction or something in between
- The story read and the story that the person posting the selfie wants to convey
- Therefore, the selfie must be considered partly fiction

## Contact information

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