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Selfies as Charitable Meme: Charity and National Identity in the #nomakeupselfie and #thumbsupforstephen Campaigns

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In March 2014, a viral campaign spread across social media using the tag #nomakeupselfie. This campaign involved women posting selfies without wearing makeup and (in later iterations of the trend) donating money to cancer charities. It was credited with raising £8 million for the charity Cancer Research UK (CRUK) and received a wealth of coverage in mainstream news media as well as across a range of blogs and news sites. The starting point for the #nomakeupselfie has been attributed by its lead campaigner to a single picture Laura Lippman posted on Twitter after Kim Novak's appearance at the Oscars on 2nd March 2014 (Ciambriello, 2014; London, 2014).¹ Novak's appearance was marred by criticism about her look. Some people on Twitter commented on how her face was not beautiful and that it was disfigured from plastic surgery. Lippman's tweet of "No makeup, kind lighting. #itsokkimnovak" (Figure 1) was noted as the starting point to the prosocial focus of this hashtag.

The meme² initially saw female users of multiple social media sites post selfies sans makeup with comments along the lines of "here's my makeup-free selfie for breast cancer." Before long, the posts mutated to being about cancer more generally, and they acquired messages with more specific actions, such as "Text BEAT to 70099 to donate £3." More people started to share these photos, sometimes accompanied by a screenshot of their mobile phone to prove they had donated. And people began to nominate others to be the next one to dare to bare. It was around this time that the trend reached enough critical mass for it to be picked up on by other media outlets, and over the following week it mutated several times more,

¹ This was not the first example of interest in makeup-free selfies; they had been a staple of celebrity gossip pages for several months prior. U.S. TV show *Today* also had its own #makeupfreemonday as part of a well-being and social media week it called #loveyourselfie in February 2014 (in which the male TV anchors' makeup-free faces were presented alongside their female counterparts).

² Memes are being defined "as pieces of cultural information that pass along from person to person but gradually scale into a shared social phenomenon" (Shifman, 2013, 18).

developing spin-off male-oriented memes, including #manupandmakeup (men wearing makeup) and #cockinasock (men naked except for socks covering their penises), as well as gaining traction internationally—generating thousands of words of commentary across news media and blog sites.



Figure 1. Laura Lippman's #itsokkimnovak tweet.

This article explores how the selfie became used as a charitable meme in this campaign and how the meme mutated from a (possibly naïve) notion of raising awareness to becoming a multimillion-pound fund-raiser. We consider the way the campaign was discussed and problematized within other media and how this contrasted with the coverage of cancer patient Stephen Sutton's social media fund-raising events during the same time period and the campaign for Britons to post selfies using the #thumbsupforstephen hashtag following his death. Finally, we consider how these cases reflect wider discourses within British

culture about charity, performativity, and national identity as well as how and why wider media responses to these two campaigns differed.

National Identity as a Mode of Discourse

For the purposes of this article, the term *national identity* and the supportive literature around it is framed beyond the construction of nationalism. The concept of national identity is “a multidimensional concept . . . [which is] extended to include a specific language, sentiments and symbolism” (Smith, 1991, p. vii). Although a sense of British national identity is, like all national identities, an inherently problematic concept (see Cook, 2004; Leese, 2006), it is nevertheless a discursive concept frequently adopted within mainstream media. Britishness is thus marked by both what it is and what it isn’t, according to mainstream media; and in this case, we argue it is inherently linked with performative charitable acts.

Charity, Performativity, and National Identity

The connection between British identity and charity is not new—from the activities of Victorian and Georgian philanthropists to large-scale fund-raising events such as Live Aid and telethons such as Sports Relief and Children in Need, Britons have long liked to see themselves as “good sorts” who give generously and selflessly (Li, Pickles, & Savage, 2005). The relationship between performance and charity is embedded in the British psyche: British pop stars routinely perform charity concerts and release charity singles (indeed, British pop stars love releasing charity singles so much that the song “Do They Know It’s Christmas?” was released four times with different line-ups); the London Marathon is noted for its costumed runners; amateur plays, pantomimes, and music performances around the country frequently involve some form of charity donation; celebrities routinely take part in sponsored events (such as comedian David Walliams swimming the channel³ or presenter Davina McCall taking on a 500-mile “breaking point” challenge⁴); and comedians were a key part of launching Comic Relief, a charity whose biannual Red Nose Day combines a broadcast telethon of sketches and celebrity performances with “hilarious” stunts designed to raise funds from the public (Green & Silk, 2000).

The sense of national pride constructed through events such as charity telethons and the annual Pride of Britain awards (sponsored by broadcaster ITV and the *Mirror* newspaper) is one in which apparent selflessness and bravery are rewarded. In charity telethons, the public are continually thanked for raising money every time a new total is revealed. In the campaigns before events such as Red Nose Day and Children in Need, viewers were shown what “others” are doing, with an invitation for “you” to join them. In this way, the campaigns attempt to create a national sense of involvement with fund-raising. Schools and workplaces are encouraged to take part in communal acts such as no-uniform days or sponsored bike rides. Partaking in acts of charity thus has an element of peer pressure associated with it—if everyone else is taking part in a sponsored event, then surely you should be, too?

The notion of something having importance to “everybody” has been at the heart of many UK cancer campaigns. Cancer Research UK’s annual Race for Life event encourages runners to tag on their shirt

³ See http://news.bbc.co.uk/sport1/hi/tv_and_radio/sport_relief/5256196.stm.

⁴ See <http://www.sportrelief.com/latest/breakingpoint>.

the name of the person (or people) they are running for. The organization's 2014 advertising campaign⁵ presents the event as a collective fight against cancer. A 2012 Stand Up to Cancer advertisement⁶ again emphasized that cancer can affect anyone, even celebrities, demonstrated by its key advocate, Kylie Minogue, while Marie Curie Cancer Care's 2014 campaign⁷ features actress Alison Steadman talking about her mother's cancer. The message is clear: Cancer affects everyone, and giving is therefore an act of love.

The appeal of partaking in the #nomakeupselfie trend is a combination of peer pressure and the sense of being dared to do something performative and potentially self-humiliating. The suggested donation amount of £3 is small, and the notion that cancer is something that affects everyone is a powerful one. The common wisdom is that if one does not take part, then one might be seen as a killjoy; someone who is overly concerned with one's own appearance to humble oneself; someone who is tight-fisted and uncharitable; or, perhaps worst of all, someone who does not care about cancer.

A Mutant Meme: The Spread of the #nomakeupselfie for Cancer

When the #nomakeupselfie trend initially emerged, it was unclear where the meme had originated, and it was not specifically aligned with a charity.⁸ CRUK, in a savvy act of marketing, quickly offered users a code and text message number to enable donations of £3 (Figure 2). From then, the campaign became associated with CRUK, and users began to recirculate the request to text as well as, on some occasions, screen grabs of their mobile phones displaying their confirmation of donation⁹—an act that can be interpreted in multiple ways: as authentic proof of donation; as proof of the user's motivation being charitable rather than narcissistic; as imploring others to do likewise; as boasting about one's generosity—or a combination of these.

⁵ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GWJEmMDQXoA>.

⁶ See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dMHkIkBnirY>.

⁷ See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q1LMtWNH_AI.

⁸ A similar meme emerged in 2010, when a meme spread on Facebook of users changing profile pictures to display cartoon characters in aid of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children—something the organization endorsed but did not originate (see NSPCC, 2010).

⁹ Several other cancer charities also used the trend in their fund-raising initiatives, but they were slower than CRUK in their response and received much less publicity.

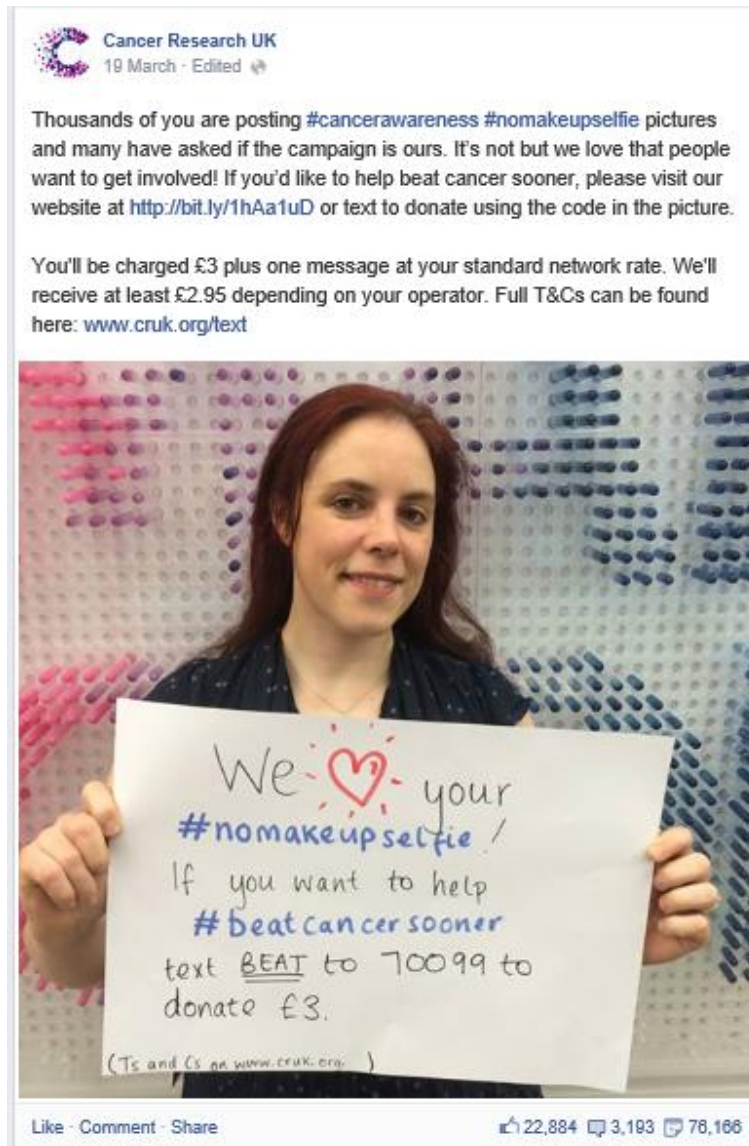


Figure 2. Cancer Research UK Facebook post, March 19, 2014.

Several days into the #nomakeupselfie for cancer trend, the meme was traced to Fiona Cunningham, an 18-year-old Scottish woman who, on March 18, began the largest “like page”¹⁰ of several dedicated to the campaign. Cunningham attributed her initial interest to the #itsokkimnovak campaign. Speaking to the *Daily Mail*, she explained her motivation:

¹⁰ See <https://www.facebook.com/OfficialNMUSFCA>.

The no-makeup selfie craze really captured my imagination and I was amazed at the response from people around the world and just thought how great it would be if it could be done for charity. After seeing nothing similar on Facebook or Twitter, I thought there was something in it that it could raise awareness of cancer. Initially I was just going to try and raise awareness for breast cancer, but it just became all cancer and that is even better. (London, 2014, para. 9–11)

Cunningham's account reveals that the campaign had no central agenda beyond making a connection between a craze she had identified—the no-makeup selfie—and a desire to support charity. Although she was initially interested in raising awareness of breast cancer, the meme mutated to being about all cancers (indeed, one of the earliest posts on the Facebook page is an image of ribbons devoted to several types of cancers, with several users posting about which cancers had been excluded) and was then appropriated by CRUK and acknowledged by wider media.

The #nomakeupselkie was not the first campaign to link charity and going makeup free. In the United Kingdom, for example, the annual Children in Need fund-raiser has asked women to go makeup free since 2012, via its "Bear-Faced" campaign, named in honor of its mascot, Pudsey the Bear. The Bear-Faced campaign¹¹ was promoted by professionally shot portraits (by Rankin) of women celebrities without makeup—but with very flattering lighting. However, this campaign didn't receive the level of traction or comment that the #nomakeupselkie attracted, possibly because the latter could be seen as a genuinely ground-up phenomenon, generated by users via social media rather than instigated via a major media or charity organization.

The #nomakeupselkie trend, although particularly popular on Facebook, spanned all social media, including Twitter, YouTube (with makeup-free vlogs or vloggers commenting on the trend), Tumblr, Flickr, and Instagram. Indeed, this presence on social media may well have been one of the reasons for the trend's success; memes tend to gain more traction when they circulate across platforms (Weng, Menczer, & Ahn, 2013). However, most media coverage focused on Facebook and Twitter, with Instagram only occasionally meriting a mention and other networks barely any—presumably due to the size and recognizability of the former two.

This spread across platforms also enabled the meme to develop a sense of nation-building, which was seized upon by charities (CRUK in particular), who posted running totals of donations received in the same manner as telethon events, and whose statuses and press releases directly addressed "you" and spoke of the "generosity of the public" (Cancer Research UK, 2014), thus enabling a sense of collective pride in participation. Luke Lewis, in *The Guardian*, argued that it was a very British trend, and he compared it to other viral media, such as website *BuzzFeed*:

¹¹ See <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b008dk4b/profiles/cin-bearfaced-2012>.

There was also a self-deprecating, very British element to #nomakeupselfie. In the UK, some of BuzzFeed's most widely shared articles are ones that have an element of gentle mockery. . . . British people love to do this. And #nomakeupselfie had a similar feel. Many people appended their photos with self-critical qualifications: "I look terrible." (2014, para. 4-5)

Narcissism or Altruism?

Another reason why the #nomakeupselfie campaign achieved so much attention was that it was not only largely driven by women, but it dealt explicitly with women's image. As scholars have noted over the years, the way women present themselves, who for, and why are frequent causes for cultural concern, in which "Women's bodies are evaluated, scrutinized and dissected . . . and are always at risk of 'failing'" (Gill, 2009, p. 99). Internet cultures are no exception to this notion, and particular attention has been paid to the ways women have used webcams as a site of identity performance and have been scrutinized and judged for how and why they might choose to do so (Hillis, 2009; Senft, 2008; White, 2006).

To present oneself before camera is a highly performative act involving careful selection of not only location, pose, clothing, makeup (or lack of), and camera angle but, in the case of a photograph, the selection of which shot will be uploaded and shared. As Shifman (2013) notes, performativity is also key to the success of many memes, with faces and bodies often integral to them—partly because this makes them replicable. The replicability of the #nomakeupselfie might have boosted its popularity—although the lack of consistency or cohesion within the selfies was something that troubled several commentators. A glance at the hashtag on Instagram or at one's news feed on Facebook revealed a plethora of interpretations of the #nomakeupselfie: women posing for the camera provocatively; working a just-got-out-of-bed look with messy hair and eye bags; assuming comedic poses or sultry poses; taking solo shots or group shots; women who don't usually wear makeup choosing to wear it; men wearing makeup; men without makeup; people posing with their friends or family who had cancer; people with cancer sharing their own selfies; charity requests with no selfie attached; criticisms of the campaign; shots of zombies or other ugly fictional beings mocking makeup-free women (see Figure 3); and even, for a short while, an anticancer research image (see Figure 4). The latter image was recirculated across social media platforms using the #nomakeupselfie tag, which seemed to combine the trend with the #sellotapeselfie trend. Yet it referred to dollars rather than pounds and so did not seem to be an explicit response to this campaign, which was largely British-based. It is unclear where it originated or how it became part of the trend.



Figure 3. "Makeup-free" zombie (effect presumably achieved using a lot of makeup).



Figure 4. Anticancer charity sellotape image.

When faced with this stream of selfies, many journalists, bloggers, and commentators felt compelled to express an opinion. Dockterman (2014) called it a “Charity-Vanity-Storm” with “the added bonus of letting all our friends and followers know that we’re doing something good, like donating money, and that we’re not so vain that we need makeup” (para. 1). Adegoke (2014) wrote for the *Independent*:

Thinly veiling vanity as philanthropy more than irks. The entire thing smacks of the Beyoncé “I woke up like this” arrogance social media has seen us become so accustomed to . . . the only “awareness” it seems to be promoting is self. Despite good intentions it’s coming across as smug and self-congratulatory, for doing very little. (para. 2, 5)

These criticisms were accompanied by positioning social media as fueling narcissism, self-obsession, and vanity—similar to how many acts of online self-presentation, from blogging to webcams, have been criticized (Marwick, 2013; Senft 2008; see also the introduction to this special issue). In some cases, former cancer patients were called upon to comment, offering criticisms of the apparent vanity of those presenting themselves without makeup, with, in one commentator’s words:

zero relevance to the experience of cancer. In my eyes, the NMS [no-makeup selfie] was supposed to be a move of solidarity for the people going through cancer. Baring yourself, exposing yourself, making you feel vulnerable, to try to understand a mere taste of the fragility that someone with cancer experiences when they look in the mirror. The photos I saw did not show that. They were still mysteriously camera ready and lacked the level of realness that the cause demanded. (Egan, 2014, para. 2)

Criticisms were couched in assumptions that the #nomakeupselfie should be something in particular—unglamorous, unattractive, vulnerable. In other words, the selfies lacked a sense of appropriate authenticity, whatever that might be.

The criticisms made particular assumptions about why these selfies were being created and who they were for. Most criticism failed to address that the audience for no-makeup selfies is not always clear. If one is performing primarily to friends or family, the performance may be one of offering a different visual presentation of oneself—but this is only true when friends or family usually do not see someone without makeup. In some cases, the no-makeup self may be the version most well-known, and participation could be seen as a response to peer pressure and a desire to appear charitable rather than an attempt to present a different visual image of the self. These criticisms, by and large, also failed to discuss variations on the meme, such as women who do not usually wear makeup adopting it or the adoption and mutation of the trend among men.¹²

The #nomakeupselfie trend, then, while being acknowledged as something that raised substantial sums of money, was depicted as a problematic trend, and one that often made journalists, bloggers, and

¹² Although there is insufficient space to address these issues within this article, it is worth noting that gender was largely perceived as a binary concept and there was an exclusion of trans* or other-gendered identities. In addition, many of the selfies depicted in media coverage were faces of White people.

other commentators uncomfortable. The next trend we discuss contrasts sharply in the way it was embraced by media outlets.

Stephen Sutton and #thumbsupforstephen

Stephen Sutton, a 19-year-old from Staffordshire, was diagnosed with cancer at the age of 15. His cancer was deemed terminal in 2012. Sutton shared his experiences with cancer, his “bucket list,” and his fund-raising activities for the Teenage Cancer Trust on his blog and on several social media platforms.¹³ Sutton built a steady following and achieved his goal of raising £10,000 for the Trust in early 2013. Following this achievement, he raised his target to £1 million. His story received national media attention and the support of celebrity followers, including several British comedians—some of whom performed at fund-raising events for the Trust.

On April 21, 2014, Sutton posted an image of himself giving a thumbs-up—usually described in reports and on his own site, as a selfie, although it is unclear whether he took the image (both hands are present in the photo)—to his Facebook page with a good-bye message to his supporters:

It’s a final thumbs up from me! I’ve done well to blag [*sic*] things as well as I have up till now, but unfortunately I think this is just one hurdle too far. It’s a shame the end has come so suddenly—there’s so many people I haven’t got round to properly thank or say goodbye too [*sic*]. Apologies for that. There was also so many exciting projects and things I didn’t get to see out. Hopefully some will continue and if you want to carry on the fundraising please do. (2014, para. 1–3)

This message was picked up on by comedian Jason Manford, who implored his Twitter followers to help Sutton reach his million-pound target. Manford used a similar technique to Cancer Research UK, posting a photo holding a donation number and code for a £5 donation. Manford echoed Sutton’s thumbs-up pose (see Figure 5) and created the hashtag #thumbsupforstephen. Other users, including more celebrities, recirculated the message, often posting their own thumbs-up selfies using the hashtag and showing the charity donation details. Sutton became national news, with all of his subsequent tweets and Facebook posts (including another thumbs-up selfie) making headlines.

Whereas media coverage of the #nomakeupselfie trend mainly concentrated on what ordinary women were doing—save a few women celebrities from the stereotypically feminine and oft-critically dismissed worlds of soap opera, daytime television, and pop music—celebrities formed a part of the coverage of #thumbsupforstephen, with well-known (often male) celebrities from the more well-regarded fields of comedy, drama, and politics being shown supporting the meme.

¹³ His bucket list involved several performative fund-raising acts, including bungee jumping and writing a comedic book. See <https://www.facebook.com/notes/stephens-story/stephens-story/545094838835573> and <http://stephensstory.co.uk/>.

At the time of his death on May 14, 2014, Sutton's JustGiving page¹⁴ had raised close to £3 million, and by the date of his funeral on May 30, this figure was more than £4 million.



Figure 5. Jason Manford's #thumbsupforstephen selfie.

On the day of Sutton's funeral, which was accompanied by a public vigil to acknowledge the support he had from the public, the #thumbsupforstephen campaign resurfaced, encouraged by Sutton's family to do something positive on that day.¹⁵ Users across social media platforms shared thumbs-up selfies as an act of support and solidarity—some adding the request to donate with the text code or link to Sutton's JustGiving page. Several users adopted a modified version of the Facebook thumb logo wearing a yellow ribbon (see Figure 6), and Sutton's hometown of Lichfield was also covered in yellow ribbons. His funeral made the headlines of all the national news outlets.

¹⁴ See <http://www.justgiving.com/stephen-sutton-TCT>.

¹⁵ See <https://www.facebook.com/StephensStory/posts/796693740342347>.



Figure 6. #thumbsupforstephen Facebook icon.

The media coverage of the last few weeks of Sutton's life featured repeated references to his heroism and bravery. More than 35,000 people signed a change.org petition for him to be knighted.¹⁶ (Sutton was not knighted, but he did receive an MBE [Member of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire], announced in the 2014 Queen's Birthday Honours list.) Owen Jones, writing in *The Guardian*, claimed of Sutton that "He inspired people to embrace life, regardless of the obstacles, to be full of compassion, and to look after each other," (2014, para. 27). Rebecca Hardy of the *Daily Mail* said, "So many adjectives have been ascribed to Stephen Sutton: inspirational, amazing, extraordinary. All of these are true, but none of them do him justice" (2014, para. 1). *The Mirror* labeled him a "teenage cancer hero" (Parker, 2014). Sutton was someone whose short life "counted," according to many reports—as if the lives of 19-year-olds who don't raise several million pounds while dying from cancer somehow don't.

Sutton's story was often linked explicitly to ideas of nationhood. *The Times* said he "inspired a nation" (Editorial, 2014, p. 9). A *Daily Mail* headline called him the "boy who lost cancer battle—but inspired Britain" (Greenhill, 2014), and the *Sunday Telegraph* claimed 'his courage went on to trigger a nationwide phenomenon' (Sawer, 2014, p. 4). This was particularly the case in *The Mirror*—not surprisingly, given that the newspaper runs the annual Pride of Britain awards. The paper featured Sutton in three cover stories and repeatedly called him a "national hero." A report on the first Pride of Britain awards following his death was headlined, "Stephen Put Such Pride Into Britain" (Parker, 2014).

Sutton's narrative journey was a perfect example of a mediated "good death" of the type outlined by Frith, Raisborough, and Klein (2012): He was praised for his openness about his illness, bravery in

¹⁶ See <http://www.change.org/en-GB/petitions/david-cameron-call-on-the-queen-to-bestow-a-knighthood-on-stephen-sutton>.

battling his condition, selflessness in raising funds for others, and acceptance that he would soon die. Frith et al. note the importance of completing to-do lists as being part of the narrative of a good death, something that was the crucial narrative hook to Sutton's story (see Figure 7). The depiction of Sutton's last few weeks and the importance of him achieving his fund-raising goal echoes the classic hero's journey narrative of overcoming adversity to achieve one's aims—something several authors have noted is common in narratives of illness, and narratives of cancer in particular (Altman, 2008; Frith et al., 2012; Kirmayer, 2000).



Figure 7. Daily Mirror and Sun front pages, May 15, 2014.

Not only did Sutton show us how to do humanity properly and how to die well, he was also an example of how social media should be used. Owen Jones (2014) claimed:

It is fashionable to be downbeat about social media: to dismiss it as being riddled with the banal and the narcissistic, or for stripping human interaction of warmth as conversations shift away from the "real world" to the online sphere. But it was difficult not to be moved by the online response to Stephen's story: a national wave of emotion that is not normally forthcoming for those outside the world of celebrity. His social-media updates were relentlessly upbeat, putting those of us who have tweeted moaning about a cold to shame. (para. 9)

Unlike the #nomakeupselfie trend, the story of Stephen Sutton was unambiguous. Here, we were told, was a good man whose continued fund-raising while dying was altruistic and selfless. As the *Mirror* put it, he was a "credit to humanity (Parker, 2014).

Conclusion

In examining these two cases, we have identified the way social media, and selfies in particular, have been used to circulate charitable memes that have led to millions of pounds in charity donations. In doing so, both the #nomakeupselfie and #thumbsupforstephen campaigns may have helped partially redeem social media and selfies in the eyes of many commentators from being sites of banality and narcissism (see the introduction to this special issue) by giving them a more morally acceptable purpose.

It is not always clear for which audience these selfies were performed or the motivations behind performance. In both cases, peer pressure through the sheer volume of users taking part in the campaigns could be a contributing factor, as could the sense of participating in a widespread act of charity, in much the same way that annual fund-raising events such as Children in Need work. In the case of the #nomakeupselfie, there was an added degree of peer pressure as many users nominated friends, family members, or followers to take part.¹⁷ Widespread news coverage of both campaigns across print, broadcast, and digital media no doubt also contributed to the sense of these being collective acts of participation and to the large totals raised in both campaigns. Despite the similarities, significant differences existed in the coverage surrounding the two campaigns.

As noted in our discussion of the #nomakeupselfie campaign, there was a sense of these particular selfies being criticized for users not performing the self in a "correct" manner, whatever that might be. Although charitable acts have long had a performative and self-sacrificial nature—whether it be bathing in baked beans or swimming the English Channel—creating a no-makeup selfie inevitably raised questions about gender, identity, and self-representation and made them harder for commentators to interpret and therefore wholly approve of; conversely, the narratives surrounding Sutton's fund-raising were unambiguously positive.

Fiona Cunningham, despite being credited with starting the #nomakeupselfie campaign that raised more than £8 million for cancer, has not been formally honored or hailed as a national hero in the way Stephen Sutton was for his fund-raising and awareness-raising endeavors. It is interesting that someone who starts a campaign using selfies—a form often associated with self-promotion—should remain unknown to many.¹⁸ Indeed, there is an irony present in the coverage of these two campaigns. The #nomakeupselfie campaign showed us several million faces, but had no single face. Indeed, when the meme was followed via a hashtag or Web search, individual selfies became lost among a sea of millions of others—largely anonymous, despite the criticisms of narcissism and self-promotion leveled at some participants.

¹⁷ This was also true of the summer 2014 Ice Bucket Challenge.

¹⁸ Although Cunningham was interviewed in a few media outlets, she did not become the key "face" of the campaign and shared little direct personal information on the Facebook page.

In contrast, Stephen Sutton's campaign was largely personality-centered, with his face and name achieving high levels of recognition. The branding on all his social media platforms emphasized his image and his story. Even though the #thumbsupforstephen campaign involved selfies from celebrities and members of the public, adding the hashtag #thumbsupforstephen to these selfies (or tagging his Facebook page in the photo if on Facebook) deflected users from any accusations of self-promotion through their acts being in Sutton's honor and name, not their own. Despite the focus on Sutton as a personality and his extensive self-driven social media campaigning, he was repeatedly referred to as "selfless"—unlike the #nomakeupselfie posters, whose motives were questioned, Sutton was presented as beyond reproach.

As we have argued, charitableness is a key component of how Britons view national identity, and Sutton in particular was framed as a national hero for his commitment to charity. When his posthumous MBE was announced, Prime Minister David Cameron was cited as saying:

I think it's right that our honours system does properly reward people that give to charity—that give their time—from the very bottom to the very top . . . there's probably more we can do to make sure that our honours system really reflects what the British public want which is to see giving, generosity and compassion rewarded. (Hodgekiss, 2014, para. 7–8)

Both selfie campaigns involved national participation in acts of charity, and in that sense could be seen as societal mirrors. However, what we see reflected back at us when we view the #nomakeupselfies is a complicated reflection that poses difficult questions regarding the importance (or not) of makeup and appearance; the way gender roles are portrayed, enacted, and scrutinized; the complicated and contradictory reasons people may have for sharing selfies; and the idea that, in giving something to charity, and being seen to do so, we may be acting as much for personal gain as for altruistic motives.

It is easier, then, perhaps, to think of ourselves as reflected in the persona of a young man dying of cancer who uses his suffering to help others. As Jason Manford was reported as saying,

The reason we took to him so passionately was because he was better than us, he did something that none of us could even imagine doing . . . he selflessly dedicated his final moments to raising millions of pounds for teenagers with cancer. (Jones, 2014, para. 22)

By choosing to align with Sutton's campaign, people could share in his glories while claiming the credit was all due to him.

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