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SELFIES IN THE WILD

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Article

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Mobile Media & Communication
1–20
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DOI: 10.1177/2050157918822131
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Selfies in the wild: Studying selfie photography as a local practice

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Abstract

Previous research on selfies has primarily focused on selfies as media products rather than as an activity. In this paper, we examine selfies as a situated practice, connecting the social media phenomenon to the local spaces where it is performed. Based on ethnographic studies of selfie photography, we present and discuss three aspects of selfies in the wild. First, we consider selfies as part of a larger photographic context and show how they are often taken in series with other genres of images. Second, we expand upon the notion of selfies as conversation and show how selfie photographers exchange messages with remote friends and followers while attending to the local environment. Third, we discuss socializing around selfies, examining how copresent friends socialize around the production of selfies. These findings show the importance of considering selfies beyond the online context, and highlight the many ways that selfies are interweaved with our everyday activities.

Keywords

camera phone, ethnography, mobile phone, selfie, social media, social photography

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Alexandra Weilenmann, professor i interaktionsdesign Foto: Madeleine Blidberg/Sveriges Radio

SOCIALA MEDIER

Ny forskning: "Selfies" för människor samman

2:30 min Min lista 205

Publicerat torsdag 4 april kl 12.19

Tidigare har bilder på oss själva, så kallade selfies, ansetts vara något introvert och självupptaget men nu visar forskning från Göteborgs universitet att det i själva verket kan fungera som en social aktivitet.

Selfies as a local practice

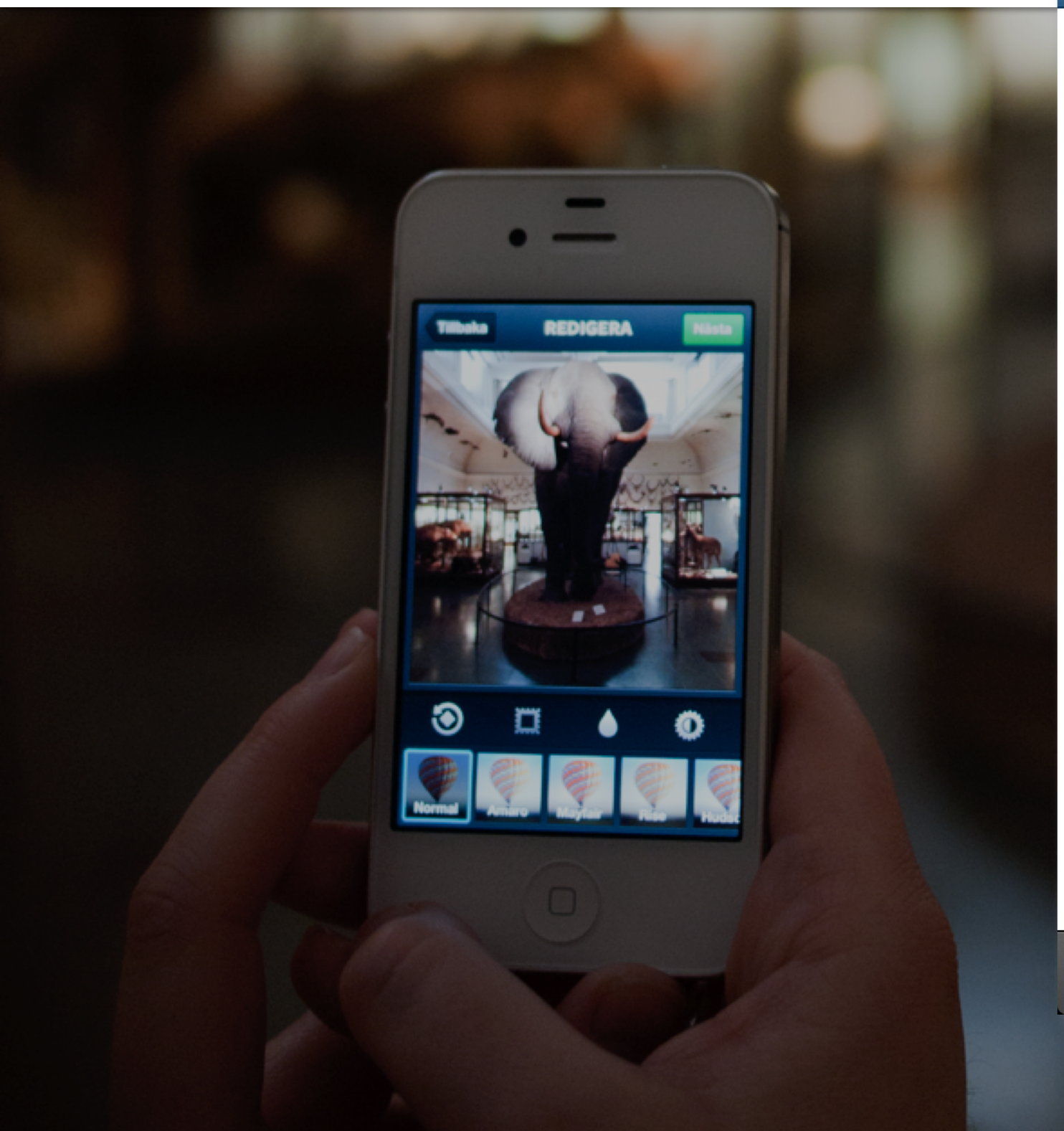
"Selfie emerges as a habit for Indonesian teenagers. Unfortunately,
I observe that Indonesian teenagers lose their social sensitivity. They take selfie,
but do not heed their surroundings. Likely, they only concern about their self-existences."

Posted on Facebook, Selfie Research Network (2015-12-11)

Selfies as a situated practice

- Connecting the online, social media phenomenon to the local spaces where it is performed.
- Locating selfies to certain places and understanding the **embedded character of selfie photograph**y
- Examining selfies as a connected practice that spans **across offline and online practices**

Local and online practices: Situated social media studies



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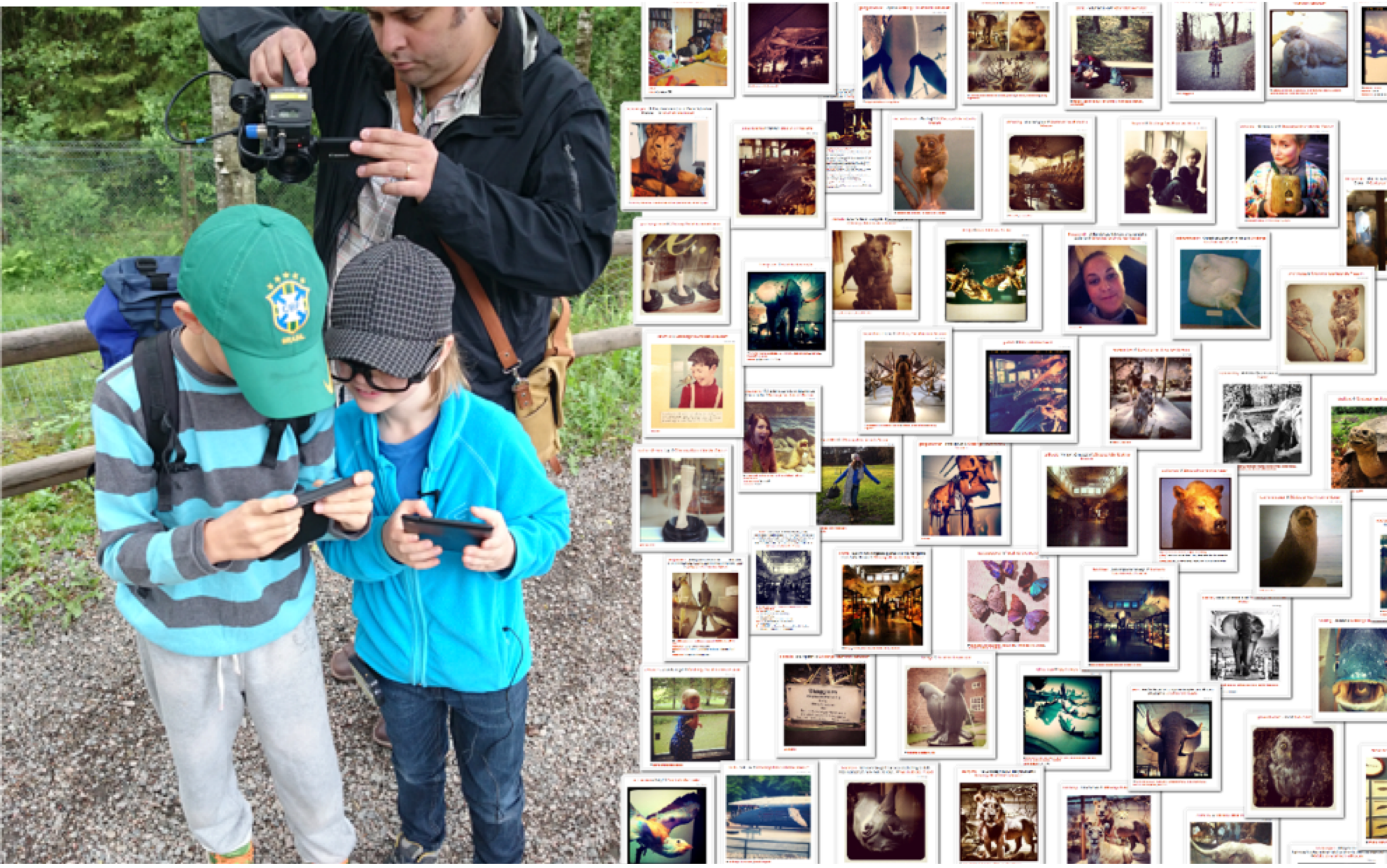
Social media in the wild



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Studying selfies in the field

- Fieldwork in museums and zoos, tourist sites and cafés
- Observing the local social organization of selfie photography

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What we learned when studying selfies in the wild

- selfies as part of a **larger photographic context**, how they are often taken in series with other genres of images.
- **selfies as conversation,** how selfie photographers exchange messages with remote friends and followers while attending to the local environment.
- **socializing around selfies**, how co-present friends socialize around the production and consumption of selfies.

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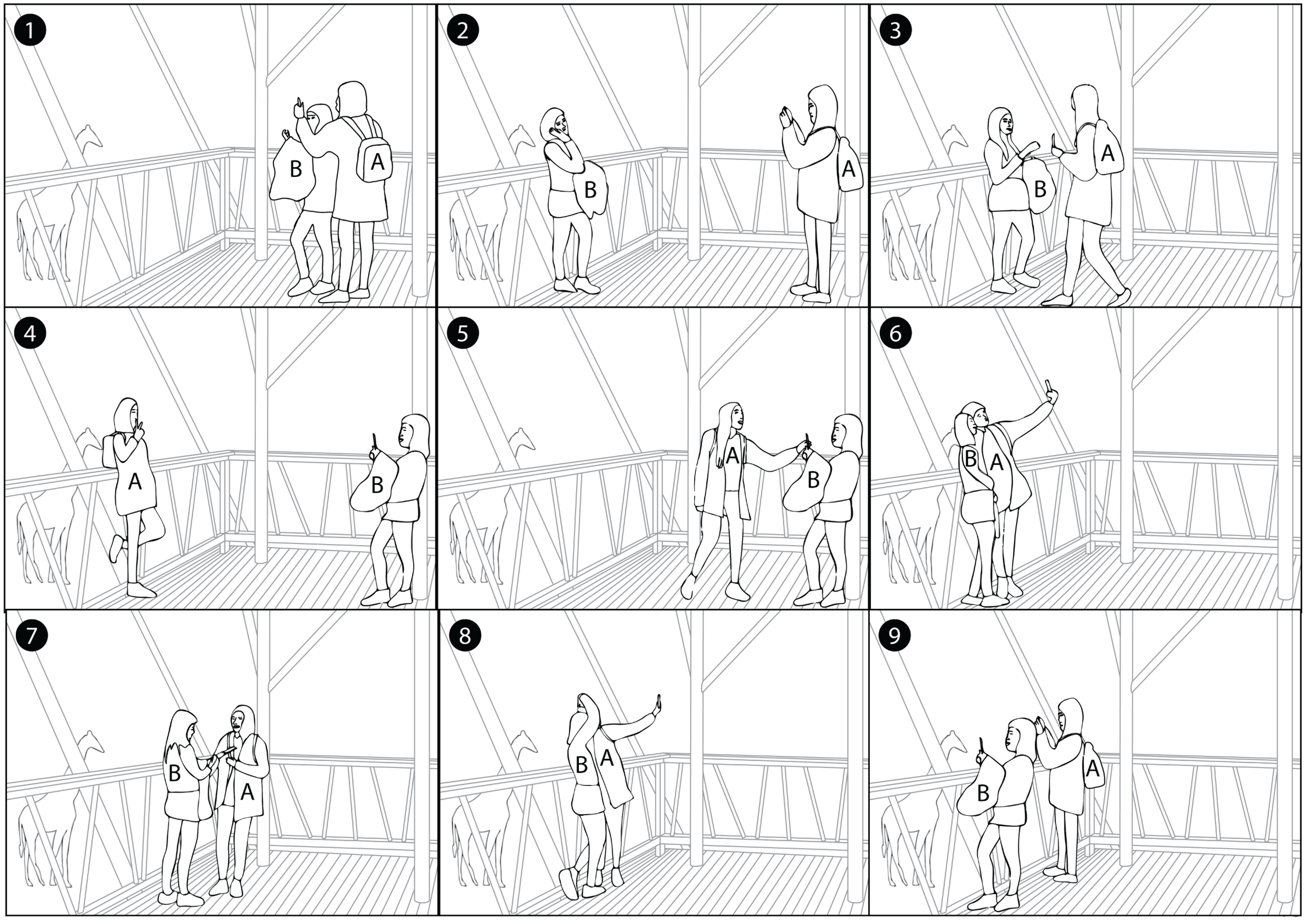
Selfies as part of a larger photographic context



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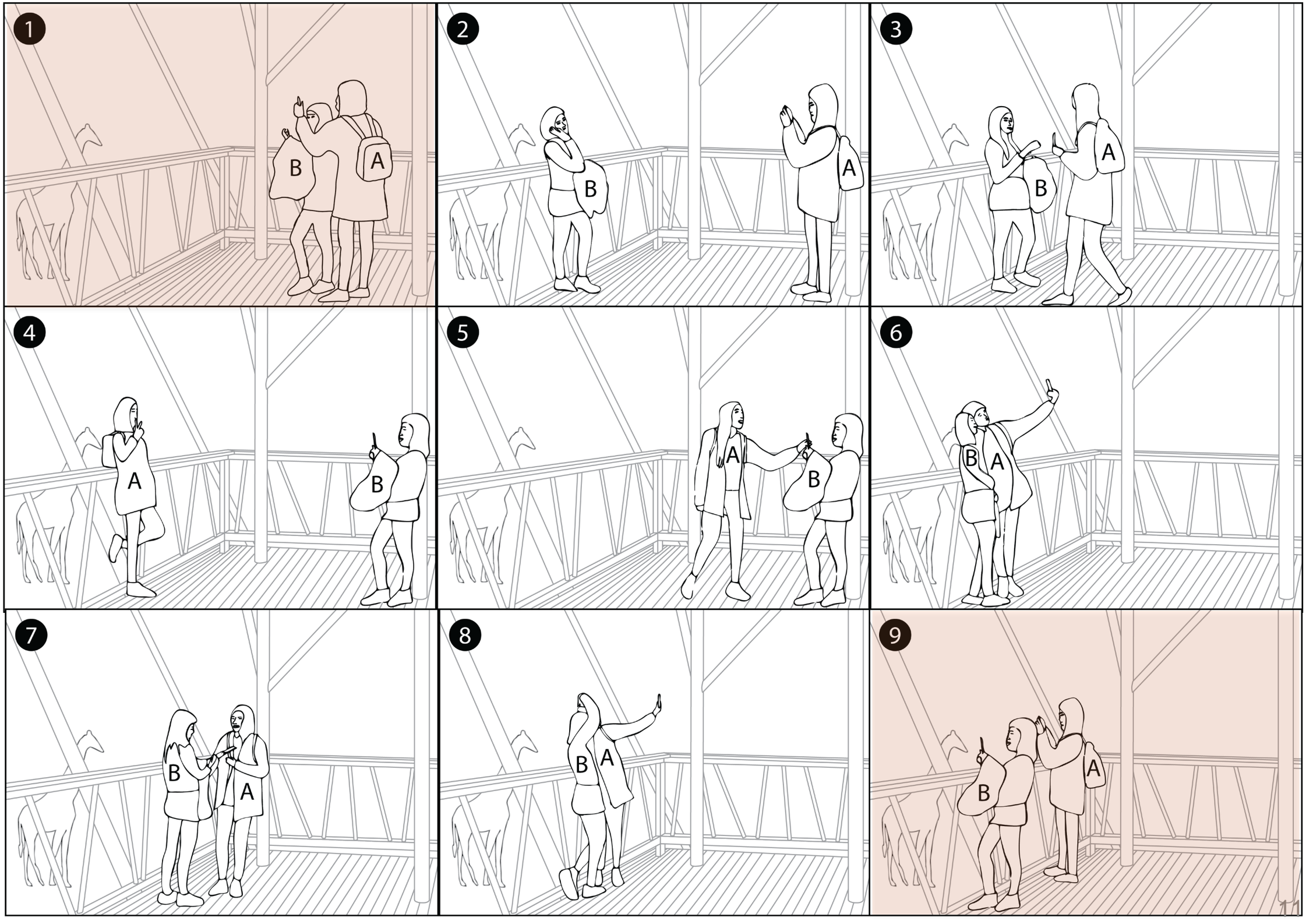
Photographs of the environment/animals



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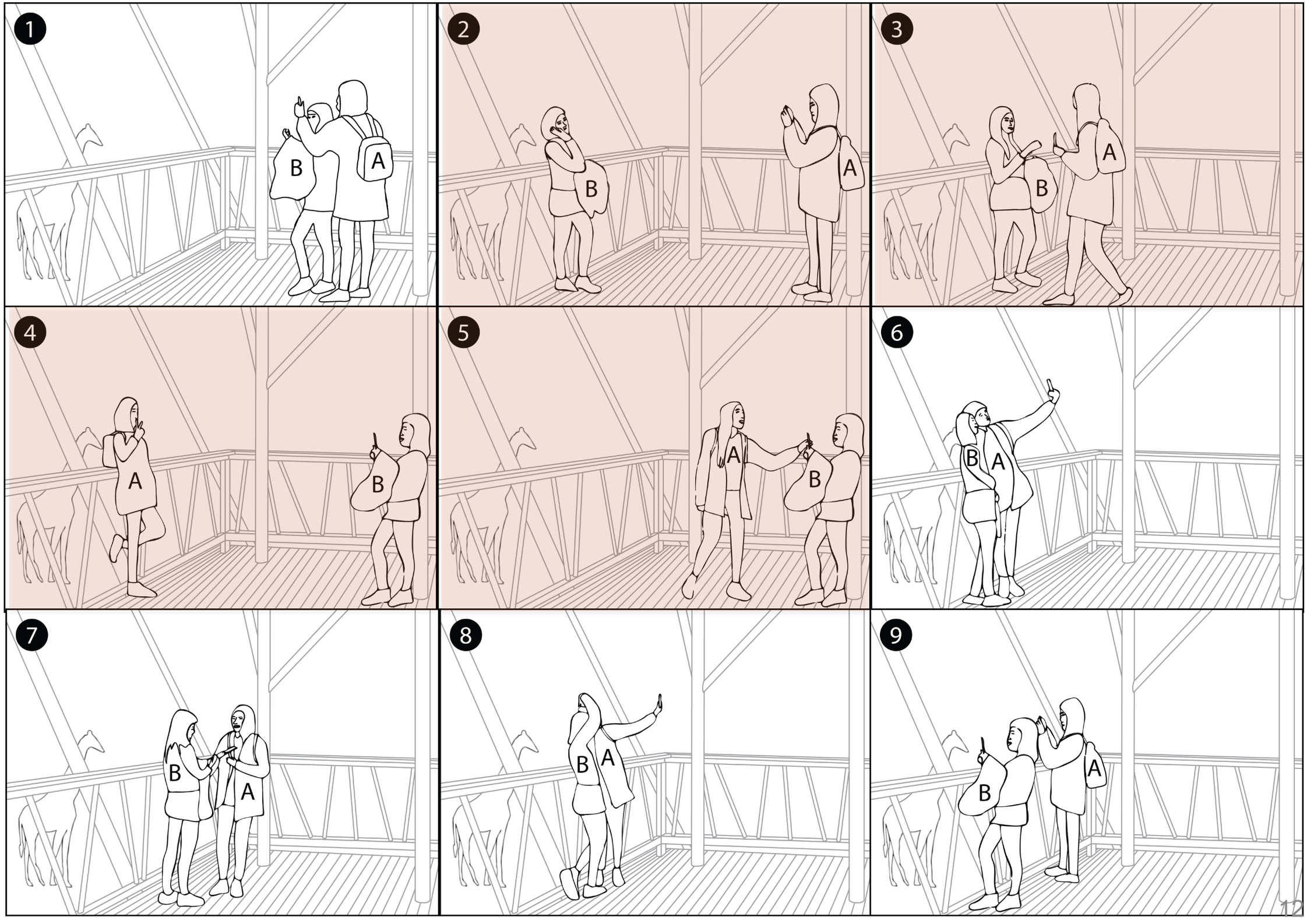
Photographs of each other in front of the animals



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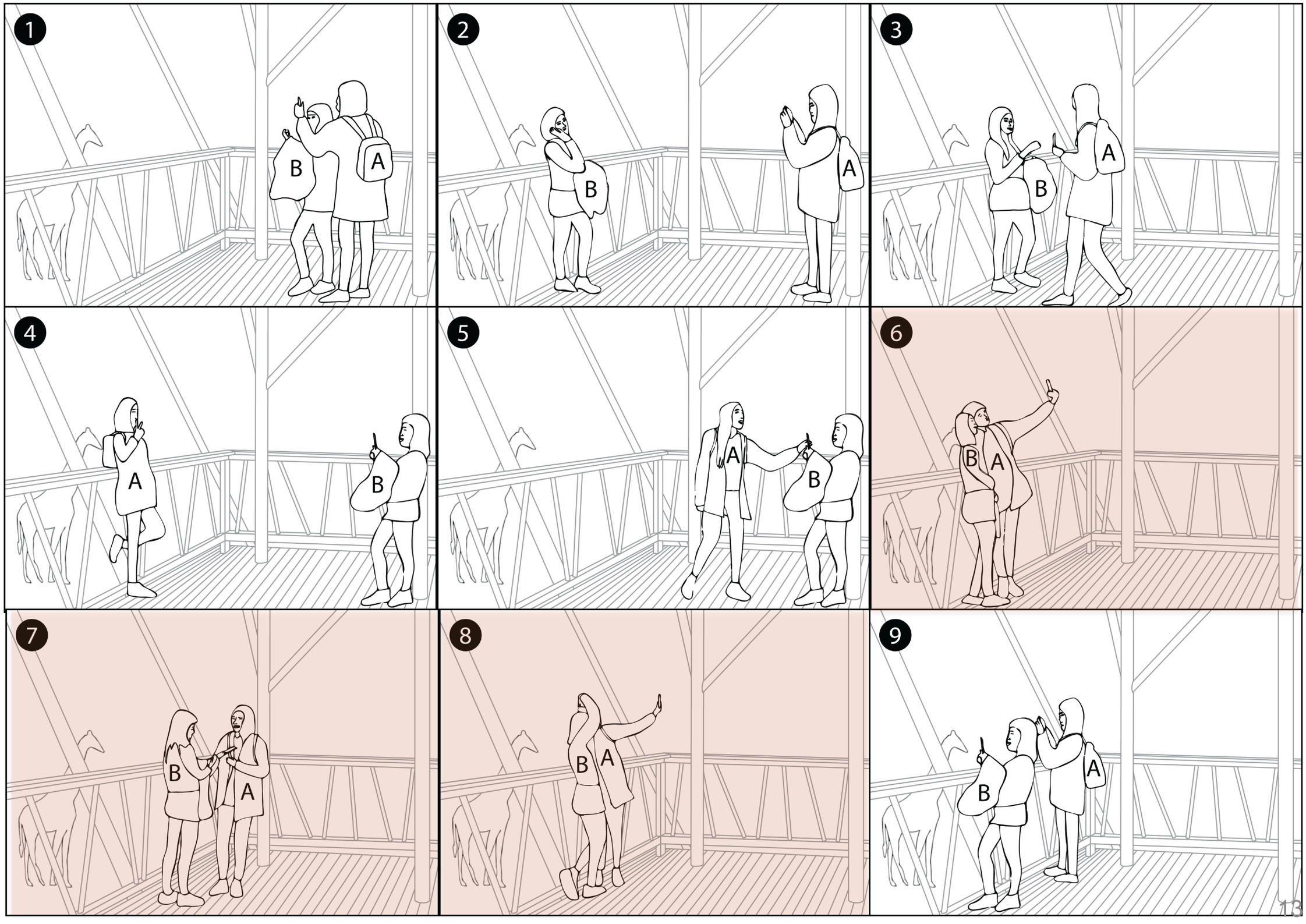
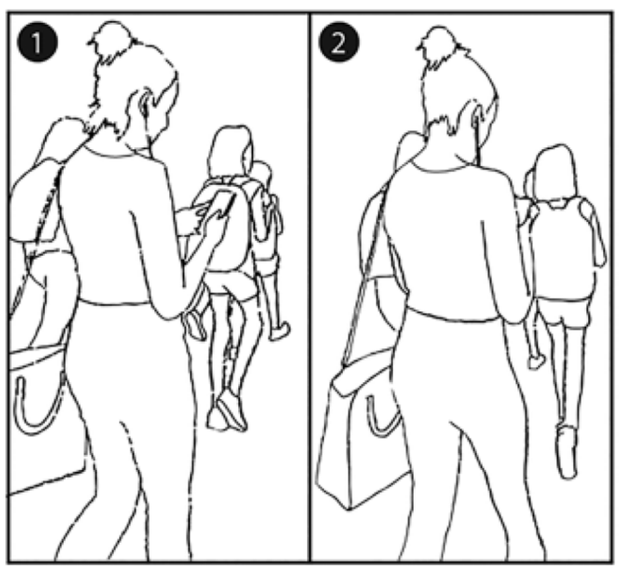
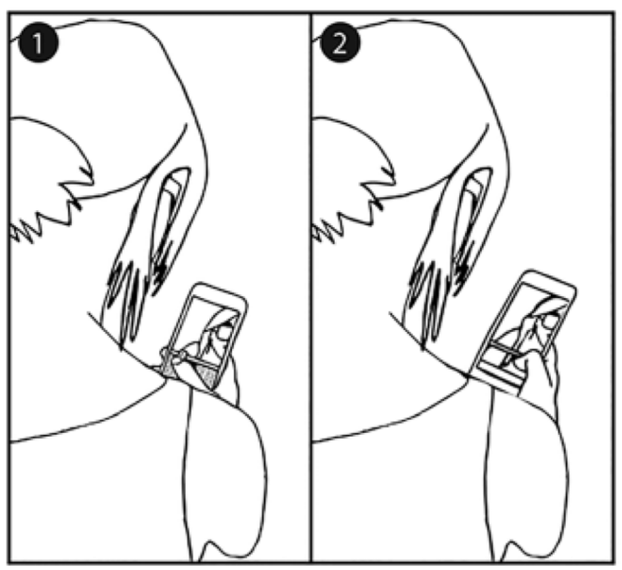
Taking group selfies, “wefies”



Selfies as conversation

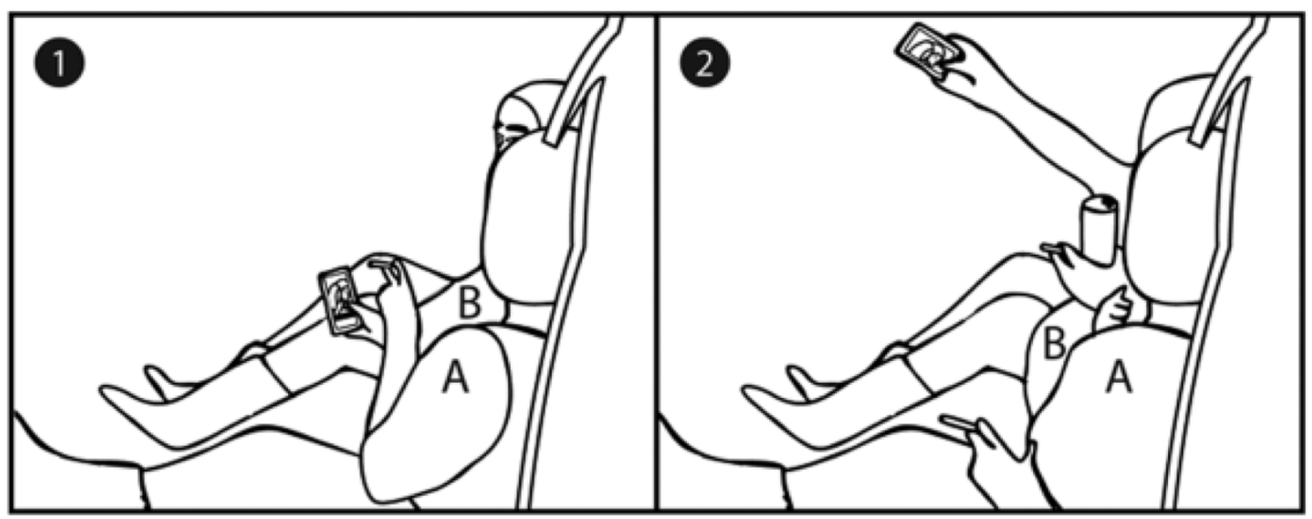
- the playful exchange of visual communication (Katz & Crocker, 2015)
- ”visual chitchat” (Villi, 2012)
- how selfie photographers exchange messages with remote friends and followers *while attending to the surroundings.*
- selfie-taking is both spatially and temporally organized





Socializing around selfies

- examining how co-present friends socialize around the production of selfies.
- Selfies can become the topic or focus of an activity in itself
- Social media as a topic generator (cf Brown et al. 2015)



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What studying selfies in the field has taught us

- Selfies are a part of a larger photographic context, where other images are taken, with different devices
- Selfie taking is embedded in other activities, not isolated instances of action
- Selfies as conversation
- Selfies in local interaction with co-present friends
- Selfies can become the topic or focus of an activity in itself
- By looking more into the ways in which selfie photography is embedded in other activities we hope to introduce a **new way of understanding selfies**

Thank you for listening!

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