The Englishness of posting

The argument of this chapter is fairly simple: while Trinidadian values, as presented through the visual postings from El Mirador, are based on a dualism of two extremes – what we will call transience and transcendence – the values of the English, as seen from visual posts in The Glades, seem to be all about cultivating the middle ground and avoiding any such extremes. So this chapter will examine how postings are used to characterise a suburban ethos, starting from the domestication of dogs and cats. We will then argue that this middle ground is protected and established through two main mechanisms, the first being self-effacement and modesty and the second humour. The chapter will end at the point where these two meet in that most English of English genres – self-deprecating humour.

Cats and dogs

One of the striking things about the way English people post their cats and dogs is that the language is often reminiscent of the way in which they refer to babies and toddlers. One reason for this may simply be that pets sometimes substitute for infants. There is some evidence that this has been an English tradition that may go back to the sixteenth century. Some young couples seem to adopt pets as a sort of ‘practice baby’, giving an exaggerated attention to the welfare of their pet that is constantly being monitored. Older people may have pets when their children have left home, or in the absence of much interaction with grandchildren. This was very clear in one instance where the family had dispersed and it had become quite rare to get visits from the grandchildren – here a lively dog seemed to do the job pretty well.
However, there is another quality that comes across perhaps more strongly in these postings. Considered in their role as Facebook postings, toddlers and pets have a very important characteristic in common – in both cases the subjects are incapable of posting for themselves. This means that the person who is doing the posting is free to post pretty much anything they like as purporting to come from the infant or pet. This makes both toddlers and pets ideal conduits for projecting ourselves vicariously through another living being. Such a situation may in turn explain why there is so much elision between the two genres of posting, as made unusually explicit in this image (Fig. 6.1).

Just as with posting of infants, we often start with the naked vulnerability of the animal (Figs 6.2 and 6.3).

An alternative may show young pets wearing clothing made to look like animal ‘babygrows’, or in least infantalising them (Figs 6.4 and 6.5).

The fact that one of these photographs features quite a fearsome husky is perhaps indicative of this process. With cats, images often seem to express an ideal of domestic containment (Figs 6.6 and 6.7).

The explicit anthropomorphising of the relationship as one of parenting or grandparenting is reinforced in accompanying texts. Photographs of animals may be referred to with comments such as

Pets, as babies, can be used to show how adults provide them with security

There are clear parallels between pets and children in the way adults can pose them in order to express the values they project on to them.
Pets can also be infantilised through dressing, which also allows them to be treated as an accessory.

Cats can be used to express domestic containment

‘mummy’s little helper’, ‘having a cuddle’, ‘it’s cuddle time’, ‘on mummy’s knee’ or ‘helping with the knitting’ (Figs 6.8 and 6.9). Alternatives are commands with a humorous note: ‘Stop playing with that laptop and FEED ME!!’ There can also be a collusion around ‘being a child’ in the combination of photograph and caption, for instance ‘I don’t know who is naughtier, Derek or me for eating ice cream in bed’ (Fig. 6.10) and ‘My poor little baby is hopefully on the mend’ (Fig. 6.11).
The fullest expression of this domestication is that even breeds of dogs such as Alsatians, perceived in Trinidad as the ultimate guard dogs of the street, are in The Glades typically posted lying on the owner’s bed (Figs 6.12 and 6.13). Cats also commonly feature on beds (Figs 6.14 and 6.15) and both cats and dogs appear on sofas (Figs 6.16 and 6.17). People in The Glades posted 100 photographs of dogs versus 52 in El Mirador (Appendix Figure 1). While there are 32 cat captions for images with pets often show parallels to parenting. Pets are often described as being ‘naughty’. When a pet suffers an illness or injury, the child–parent parallel becomes even stronger.
In The Glades, unlike El Mirador, dogs are more often shown inside, even on the owner’s bed.

Cats also appear on beds.

photographs in El Mirador compared to 36 in The Glades, 20 of those in El Mirador are posted by the same person (Appendix Figure 1). However, the important contrast comes when we examine how the animals are viewed. It is striking that at least on Facebook (Instagram is different), approximately 90 per cent of photographs of cats and 80 per cent of photographs of dogs are taken inside the home rather than outside. This is despite the fact that The Glades is a village with abundant opportunity to go walking in the fields. Dog owners are often to be seen in certain well-known areas at the periphery of the village; these shared walking areas are one of the places where the animals become a means of developing friendships between owners. Yet pets are rarely posted on Facebook while on these walks, as compared to lying on carpets and sofas. By contrast we will see in Chapter 8 that to post a photo of a dog inside is so exceptional that most people commenting on the image simply assumed that it could not actually be a Trinidadian doing the posting.
Even the outside shots of animals can look pretty domesticated. If dogs do appear outside on Facebook, it is most likely because they are on holiday or going for long walks. In such images they appear as an accompaniment to English people’s enjoyment of long country walks (Figs 6.18 and 6.19).

In addition some young girls have a ‘horse phase’, with the ability to indulge this being seen as a perk of living in a village (Fig. 6.20).

So although photos of dogs and cats are both posted in El Mirador and The Glades, in the former they are creatures of the outside world

Even the outside shots emphasise dogs in pretty environments or on a lead rather than fearsome or strong
and the street, while in The Glades they are part of a more general project of domestication (Fig. 6.21). Another image portrays a dog engaging with the weather – perhaps the single most favoured topic of English domestic life (Fig. 6.22). The amusing context is reinforced by the accompanying text.

In the section on humour, we will start to differentiate between these pets. In contrast to ‘man’s best friend’, the cat is regarded as the more naturally autonomous – and can consequently be used to express a more ambivalent commentary on this domestic bliss.

Suburbia

Pets in England have become an extreme example of taking originally wild forms and turning them into, in this case, accoutrements of the bedroom, or members of the family analogous to toddlers. This
domestication reflects a wider set of ideals in England; values that are most fully expressed by the concept of suburbia. Suburbia is itself a highly consistent expression of English values, fully embodied by The Glades—a dual village that is able to encompass all that English people expect of village life and yet has rapid access to everything that London has to offer. This combination of the best of town and country might have been achieved by a similar dualism to that we find in Trinidad—one that kept each pole as integral and opposed. But instead in The Glades we found a constant focus upon that which combines the two. Suburbia is best expressed by the semantic continuity of the half-timbered, semi-detached, sub-urban areas of the middle class.

Returning for a moment to those dogs; currently the main passion that is found among The Glades dog owners is for new forms of dogs—a rather neat expression of this consistent search for the compromise or middle group. The true dogs of The Glades are now the Cockapoos and the Labradoodles, which were far and away the breeds of dogs most commonly discussed by informants in the village. Both represent the deliberate interbreeding of a traditional sporting and field dog with a miniature or toy dog that is particularly resonant of this domesticity. It is hard to imagine how the English could have more clearly expressed this cultivation of suburbia through selective breeding.

The same argument seems to carry for another major genre of posting. It would have been perfectly possible for the people of The Glades to post streams of photographs of the fields and forests that lie just beyond the village and are extremely scenic. Equally they might have posted abundant images of their home interiors, to which they devote considerable time and attention. While photographs can be found of both of these, they are actually quite rare on Facebook. People do not point their camera at the inside of a room to show off their decoration unless it has been newly done up for an infant or unless they wish to illustrate some labour in the tradition of DIY. The latter, a consummately suburban pastime, is significantly mainly shown when it has gone wrong and is therefore amusing (Fig. 6.23).
The one genre that does seem well suited to showing suburban values, because it is neither pure country nor home interior, is the garden. We found 48 photos of domestic gardens in The Glades, but none at all in El Mirador, where shots of home interiors are more common than in The Glades. This is reminiscent of the experience of the Swiss anthropologist Sophie Chevalier, who came to England in the 1990s hoping to replicate her study of French home interiors with English ones. In the end she wrote her paper about gardens because she kept finding that her English informants would rapidly insist that they leave the home area she had come to study and admire the garden outside.² The images we find on Facebook feature flowerbeds, paddling pools, the activity of gardening and making snowmen (Figs 6.24, 6.25, 6.26 and 6.27).

The gardens are the place of both labour and relaxation. But this taming process it often represents also goes for the local countryside. Pictures intended as a tribute to the wilderness tend to be located either abroad or in much wilder places, such as the countryside of Scotland. On
Facebook photos taken in England are more often the results of walking holidays or day trips spent walking in what is often quite a domesticated landscape covered in paths (Fig. 6.28), or scenes of country pubs (Figs 6.29 and 6.30).

The appropriate expression seems to be that of ‘cultivating’ suburbia. This implies that we cannot take this middle ground for granted: it needs constant protection. The contrast is with the segment of the population discussed at the end of Chapter Four who tend to live in social housing or cheap private rental accommodation. The fact that the postings of that population on topics such as sex and politics are much more vivid and overt may help to define the middle-class sensibility based on a constant desire to distance themselves from these others. Instead they seem to be trying to capture the kind of idyll represented in Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* by The Shire: a place that seems secure, but with wolves and orcs beyond its borders. Again we see a stark contrast with El Mirador with its far greater use of images taken from religion, street culture and assertive nationalism.

The study of Facebook postings helps us to identify two key devices that seem to have been appropriated precisely to prevent this movement to extremes. These are forces designed to prevent us from taking
ourselves or anything else too seriously, which keep us from climbing up out of the comfortable middle zone. The first of these is simply self-effacement and modesty, ensuring that we do not focus on ourselves as the project, but instead draw attention to the context within which we live. The second mechanism of control is humour – a strategy that tears down any alternative edifice by removing its claims to solidity and seriousness and instead brings us back down to the good earth of the garden.

**Self-effacement**

One of the striking differences between Trinidad and England is the response of mothers to the birth of their children. The point about the next set of photos is that they are not the profile photos of babies’ accounts. They are taken from what are supposed to be the profile photos of their mothers (Figs 6.31 and 6.32).

Far from this being exceptional, it is almost always the case that if you look at the profile picture album of a mother from The Glades on Facebook then the pictures will be a sequence largely of that person – until she gives birth. After the birth and often for a year or two after that point, her profile pictures are more likely to be those of her infant than herself. In some instances she virtually disappears from her own profile pictures.

Mothers in The Glades routinely replace their own profile pictures with those of their babies.
This illustration is of the entire profile pictures album of one such mother. It starts with an image of her (the oldest images are at the bottom right). After the birth of her child one or two images appear that include both the infant and a parent. After a while she completely disappears, however, to be replaced entirely by the sequential images of the infant alone (Fig. 6.33).

Fathers are more variable, but the same phenomenon can be found there also. In comparing the two sites, 612 photos of babies or toddlers on their own appear in The Glades compared to 315 in El Mirador (Appendix Figure 1). In The Glades there are 415 images of the woman alone, posted by 23 women, whereas in El Mirador 1,006 images of the woman on her own were posted by 25 women. In The Glades there are usually also some images that ensure that the strong bonding between mother and infant has been captured and posted in its own right (Figs 6.34 and 6.35).

All of this is entirely consistent with studies conducted previously by Miller on practices of consumption and how they reflect the degree to which the birth of a baby is also the birth of a new person – a mother. That is to say, in becoming a mother a woman is now someone defined by a relationship rather than existing in their own right, hence the title of Miller’s earlier publication ‘How Infants grow Mothers in North London’. Mothers can entirely replace themselves with an idealised version of their infant – partly because, just as with dogs and cats, the infant has no independent agency at this stage so anything can be projected on to them.
Such self-effacement has to be seen in context, however, since it is by no means an isolated instance. In comparing the photos of individuals in England and Trinidad, a whole series of ways emerge in which the people of The Glades seem essentially indifferent to how they appear. It is not merely that they do not try to be glamorous or that, while we have many instances of ‘bling’ within Trinidad, this is entirely absent in The Glades. More importantly, it really doesn’t seem to matter much at all what people are wearing when a photo is taken nor – more significantly – when they choose a photo to be posted on their own timeline (Figs 6.36, 6.37, 6.38 and 6.39). Typical images show men are wearing a T-shirt and jeans, while women may wear a dress or perhaps a shirt, but neither appear to have paid a lot of attention in choosing what to wear. Most of these women spend a reasonable amount of money both on clothes and appearance, for example when they go to work. Yet their Facebook pictures have an emphasis on looking causal and removed from the pressures of fashion. There is certainly no sense that they changed clothes for this photograph, nor that concern with what they were wearing impacted on the decision of whether or not to post the image. Clothes are decent and comfortable; they are simply not special. By comparison, these are core concerns within El Mirador. Appendix Figure 1 shows a total of 142 photos in The Glades where people seem to be drawing attention to what they are wearing, but these are mostly teenagers. In contrast, there are 576 in El Mirador. In a contrast even more extreme, we have only three instances in The Glades where a woman seems to be posing as a kind of faux model, compared to 142 such images from El Mirador.
The contrast is just as striking when we move from clothing to the body. Trinidadians are very conscious indeed about almost every part and aspect of their bodies as these appear online, making the ways in which these are effaced in The Glades quite remarkable. As noted, the main problem with the ‘no make-up selfie’ was that so many of these women routinely went without make-up, as they explained to Miller and Ciara Green, and so could do nothing special for that photograph. They certainly care for their hair and nails, but again it didn’t seem that they paid more than a few seconds of token attention to these matters when it comes to the images posted on Facebook.

Sometimes this effacement is quite extreme. We have cases of female graduates in their twenties, women who would generally be regarded as very good looking. But if one had wanted to show to another person that this was the case, it is simply not possible from the albums
of photographs on their Facebook. There are simply no clear images of them at all, either in their own posting or as tagged, that can be used to demonstrate that they are good looking, let alone glamorous or sexy. The women may appear in the shade or background, but they have systematically avoided any such images. We found a few instances of this behaviour even among school pupils, but those were exceptional. As women grow older, this becomes more common. They are present within the material, but it is as though they have made an effort to avoid precisely the kinds of images that – not only in Trinidad, but in most countries of the world – would have been the key to the project of representing oneself on Facebook. They are there, but the image is not about them.

As an example, there are very few English photos in which it seems that legs are intended to feature as more than the part of the body which by default also appears in long-distance shots. The legs are included only because of the type of photo taken. They are not showing off their legs or using them as expressive of sexuality in the way that Trinidadians routinely would. There is a sense in which the body is essentially a ‘non-descript’, taking that word literally. It is effaced to the degree that there should be nothing at all that can be said about it.

If one looks at the images from holidays as discussed in Chapter 4, sometimes people appear in holiday shots wearing a bikini or swimming trunks. Even here, however, the photo is of them in the water smiling, or as foreground giving scale to the landscape and scenic elements. There are no images similar to those of the selfie girls, which represent a teenage phenomenon, or the Trinidadian exploitation of the beach precisely in order to expose and celebrate the body. Consistent with this is the degree to which the informality of these shots derives from women being photographed incidentally to what they are doing. A common shot that allows a woman to appear in the photo is as the person holding a baby. These may be more posed, with the woman smiling, but at other times she seems more like the prop enabling us to gain a better picture of the baby in question. One exception is when people dress up in fancy dress for a party, but this seems again to be typically English in that they are only allowed to feature as themselves while being made fun of. Some of these photos appeared in Chapter 4 (Figs 4.69, 4.70 and 4.71).

Of course as with all these statements, the term English or even ‘The Glades’ is an over-generalisation. We have seen that these claims would neither be true of schoolchildren nor of some of those who live in
social housing. There are bound too to be some photographs, and indeed some people, that do everything our generalisation claims does not happen. These are generalities of social science, not natural science. They are precisely what we see ‘in general’, so an aberrant instance does not refute these arguments, as long as it remains uncommon. This is also one of those areas where a claim to quantification can easily become a kind of fake objectivity. We examined ten profiles of women aged around 30 or over. We found that out of 3,987 pictures there were only 191 that consist of pictures of that woman on her own, which reinforces this argument for self-effacement. It is more difficult when we come to more qualitative assessments. In our opinion out of nearly 4,000 photos there were only 15 (apart from wedding pictures) that seem posed so as clearly to display the item of clothing that a woman is wearing. This type of photo might elicit the comment ‘I recognise that dress now, it’s the one you bought in sunny Folkestone’, or show someone dressed up to go out (Fig. 6.40).

Clearly the judgements behind such figures are subjective, but this may be balanced by the sheer scale of this evidence for lack of conspicuous display. What makes this most effective as an anthropological argument is that we are not focusing on any single feature. It is the combination of all of these observations around the effacement of the body, of clothing and the replacement of mothers by their infants, and the fact that men are even less likely to show concern with clothing and appearance, which when examined together suggest a general tendency towards modesty and keeping the individual from becoming the project of cultivation. A more general ethnographic treatment, which provides far more extensive coverage of modesty and self-effacement as a characteristically English trait, is found in Kate Fox’s book *Watching the English.*

Women posing to show off their clothing, as here, are remarkably rare in The Glades.
Humour

Self-effacement is one of two ways in which people in The Glades distance themselves from being taken seriously or from becoming the centre of attention. Perhaps the still more English mode of retaining the centre ground and refusing to be drawn out is the use of humour. English humour is curious in various regards, but the most important quality from the perspective of this book’s argument is humour being used not so much for being funny as for ensuring that nothing is taken too seriously. On Facebook, humour tends to organise itself around various genres. There are many, but here we will just briefly examine what seem to be among the three most common: the ability to project on to one’s pets, the use of puns and the use of the word ‘fuck’.

Funny cats

As noted above, the cat is well primed to express something analogous to the ‘semi-detached’ house. More than with dogs, the cat seems to possess an inevitable autonomy. It can therefore be a cuddled infant as well as a creature whose position of distance or disdain provides a humorous and critical running commentary on this same domesticity, of which it is the only half-acquiescing victim. One woman has got this potential down to a fine art with her long stream of funny captions; only a few are shown here to give a sense of what she uses her cat to do.

We can start with the integration of the cat into that most English of comic genres, ‘toilet humour’. The following two images have the captions ‘It’s hard to concentrate on doing a wee with this staring up at you’ and ‘He’s obsessed with the toilet. It’s a nightmare when you need a piss’ (Figs 6.41 and 6.42).

Cats can be good subjects for aspects of toilet humour
Other typical posts that express this English sort of critical distancing would include the caption ‘so judgemental’ (Fig. 6.43).

The contrast with Trinidadian posting is that although cats may also be used there for humour, the tendency is either to make sexualised references (including the ambiguity of the term ‘pussy’) or to represent something more wild or even evil. In The Glades the genre of humour is much more respectful (Figs 6.44 and 6.45). In the latter image, the last line of the poster reads: ‘He’s not lost or anything. Just thought you should see him.’

**Puns**

Puns and plays with words are perhaps the bedrock of English humour. There are countless memes featuring wordplay, although people also just pun in text without resorting to visual memes (Figs 6.46, 6.47, 6.48 and 6.49).

There are also many memes that are a parody or give a twist to a theme. The ‘Keep Calm’ series is especially common. Also frequently used are images that play on ordinary life, or that make moral points through joking (Figs 6.50 and 6.51).
The pun remains the stalwart of English humour. It appears on Facebook in text and as visual memes.

Second to the pun in English humour is irony or subversion, both also a feature of many posts.
‘Fuck’ is funny

The other remarkably common form of humour is pretty much anything with the word ‘fuck’ in it, as in this series. Much more rarely, other words such as ‘cunt’ may work for particular instances (Figs 6.52, 6.53, 6.54, 6.55, 6.56 and 6.57).

‘Fuck’ stands out as funny in its own right, with much more occasional use of other swear words.
There are many reasons why the word ‘fuck’ has this prominent role, but clearly one of them is that the word is used as a kind of check on what otherwise would be a trajectory towards taking something seriously. Often it seems that one was just about to take something as significant and worthwhile in its own right, whether doing the housework, religion or caring about other people. Just about to – but then, at the last moment, the word ‘fuck’ conveniently appears and saves you from this fate. Suddenly you realise that actually you ‘don’t give a fuck’. So the word may be used to deflate the self-regard of others, or the idea that we are supposed really to care about them. But equally it is used to prevent any serious self-regard or taking ourselves or our convictions too seriously. ‘Oh fuck it’ brings us back to what is portrayed here as the natural self, just in time.

If humour is to be employed to prevent any slippage into the seriousness of the moralistic and religious on the one hand, or the sexual and the libertarian on the other, then it helps if it is allowed to attack attempts to claim moral order directly. An obvious example would be religious images. Because of the specific nature of English liberalism, we do not find humour used against Muslims, Jews or any other target group where it might be seen as racist. Yet in The Glades images that Christians might find offensive do appear as posts (Figs 6.58, 6.59 and 6.60).

Posts from The Glades appear to indicate it is acceptable to make jokes about Christianity as the established religion of the state, but not other religions.
If the desire is to avoid taking anything too seriously by returning to the middle ground, then a final logical problem presents itself. What if we also take the project of the suburban middle ground itself too seriously? It seems that the people of The Glades also need to ensure that being suburban and domestic is not seen as too serious an aim of life. On the whole, women seem to be delegated the craft and labour of the home, with men mainly involved in the manual side of DIY. So women have whole genres of humour devoted to not being seen as too serious about being ‘domestic goddesses’. Here we find various jokes about housework and the home (Figs 6.61 and 6.62).

These may be taken alongside a series of images shown in Chapter 4, which focused on the role of wine. As noted, wine itself was not taken seriously as a subject, with such postings ensuring that they would not be seen as connoisseurs, or even French or Italian. Instead the simple generic ‘wine’ could be used to similar effect as the word ‘fuck’. In those Facebook postings also the attitude seems to be about debunking potentially serious topics: ‘Sod all that, let’s just have a glass of wine.’

Serious posting

Most genres of serious posting are less common in The Glades than in El Mirador, but this chapter would considerably mislead if these were ignored entirely. For some of our English informants all Facebook is serious. This includes a few individuals whose strong religious beliefs dominate their postings, most of whom, but not all, are also elderly (Figs 6.63 and 6.64). The straw crosses pictured below were made by the person who posted them for Palm Sunday (Fig. 6.65).
A single Muslim informant provided the only example of religious posting other than Christians (Fig. 6.66).

An exception to the infrequency of posting on serious topics seems to be references to current news. It seems acceptable to be serious in support of environmental/climate change/green issues, for instance, and there are postings on those themes. Yet serious political commentary was less common in The Glades than in El Mirador, suggesting again that many English people feel that it is precisely regarding serious issues that it is best to present one’s posting in humorous terms. These would appear to be less true of postings from people living in social housing (Figs 6.67 and 6.68).
In addition, some postings relate to the memory of those who were killed in the two World Wars, reinforcing our observation that the centenary memorial day for the First World War in 2014 was one of the best attended events during field work on The Glades. The two villages comprising The Glades lost 175 soldiers during the two World Wars (Figs 6.69 and 6.70).

One exception to the relative lack of serious posting is memorialisation of the two World Wars, which remains a significant village event.
Self-deprecation

While the last section acknowledges the presence of some genres of more serious posting, we have now discovered that, more generally, there are two legs upon which the English figure is able to stand: one is self-effacement and modesty and the other is humour. Given this, it seems entirely reasonable that the climax of this craft would have to be the combination of these two elements in what may be taken as the quintessential form of English humour – self-deprecation. Making jokes at one’s own expense, for instance by wearing over-the-top Xmas glasses, seems to be the single most English mode of self-expression (Fig. 6.71).

For example, one sequence of images is taken by someone who clearly is trying to make fun of herself in pretty much every posting she makes. She dresses to look silly in a mock historical costume or pulls strange faces for the camera (Figs 6.72, 6.73 and 6.74). She also uses a snail as her profile photo. It may be no coincidence that she is also a generous individual who helps in village activities in various ways and is particularly good at embodying and expressing village values. Self-effacement is of itself a generous act, in which one suppresses the cultivation of the self in order to give entertainment to
others. She is by no means alone. Both males and females will find ways of using both text and images to achieve this form of humour.

Sometimes it is not a picture of the self, but rather a stupid thing that that person has done (and that now everyone else needs to know about) which provides the inspiration for the image, such as putting a plug socket in upside-down (Fig. 6.75) or suffering an unprofessional series of events: ‘Spray myself when testing the shower, then shout ‘shit fucker’ in front of a potential tenant, now off to meet a landlord while looking like I’ve wet myself. Just not my day’ (Fig. 6.76).

In one example a woman, rather than posting photos showing off her shoes, presents her swollen feet with the caption: ‘Excuse the awful feet, but def know it’s warming up due to swelling to my left foot . . . Every year it happens. No nice shoes for me . . . ’ (Fig. 6.77).

In another a woman posts an illustration of her own distracted behaviour with a caption of self-deprecating humour: ‘Guess who was in a hurry this morning – How Embarrassing!’ (Fig. 6.78).

As always images of children may contribute to the amusement, as in Fig. 6.79: ‘Potty practice!!!! We have a long way to go I think!!’

As we shall see in the next chapter, people in Trinidad feel the need to confirm their glamorous and expressive selves at precisely the
same time that the English seek to disparage themselves. Self-deprecation may in some cases become effective self-effacement when subjects literally disappear from being their own profile pictures. This goes along with the elimination of the body as expressive and the general absence of explicitly sexual posts. In comparing this chapter with the previous two focusing on the English field site, we can see that the contrast is not only in relation to Trinidad, but also within the nature of Englishness itself. Of course some groups do not conform to these generalisations, for instance the posts of young people still at school, a gay male and some of those who live in social housing. But in a sense, precisely because these groups may feel excluded from the mainstream, their different posts in effect reinforce a dominant central ground that has no desire to be associated with any of them.
Two books provide the background to these English values. In her book *Watching the English* Kate Fox examines the everyday behaviour of English people in a similar ‘home counties’ region. She is particularly successful at conveying the centrality of humour such as self-deprecation as well as the avoidance of extremes, based in a general modesty of self-expression which tries to avoid drawing attention to oneself. In many ways this chapter provides evidence that English people present themselves through visual media in ways that confirm her observations of conversation and everyday behaviour.

The most focused account of the wider context for this chapter is, not surprisingly, Miller’s own volume on *Social Media in an English Village*, since this is an account of the very same field site. This provides other grounds for English reticence based on a constant concern to protect the privacy of the domestic arena that has strong historical roots in English society. An inherent desire for privacy is directly threatened by the specific nature of social media as a mode that spans the traditional dualism of private and public domains. The people of The Glades were quite open about the threat that they felt social media posed to their traditional way of life, in which a net curtain preserved the sanctity of the private home combined with a limited gaze on to the public street. The primary argument of *Social Media in an English Village* is that English people re-purpose social media such as Facebook to create what Miller calls a ‘Goldilocks strategy’ of keeping other people at an appropriate distance: a clearly defined middle ground that avoids relationships becoming too hot or too cold. What this chapter adds to that argument is the evidence of how visual display corresponds to these concerns – by a combination of being circumspect and modest in the way one presents oneself online alongside the recourse to humour as the best response to any social threat or embarrassment.