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The Brutal Truth About Selfies, Narcissism, and Low Self-Esteem

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It used to be that having a good-looking yearbook photo was the main concern of the young and the vain. With the advent of social media, there is more and more pressure to look good online.

Enter the *selfie*: The self-photograph that can get out of control.

Self-portraits are nothing new. Artists such as Vincent van Gogh have used paint and canvas to create “analog selfies” for hundreds of years. In fact, van Gogh created more than 30 self-portraits between the years of 1886 and 1889.

The word “selfie” didn’t even exist until the year 2002. The term specifically refers to the use of a digital camera to take a self-portrait. Because digital cameras (or smartphones with cameras) can take pictures so quickly and easily, selfies have become a staple of the modern online landscape.

Selfies have also spawned an entire selfie product industry, with selfie sticks, remote controls, and even selfie drones flooding the digital market.

At the same time, selfies have gotten a bad reputation for being something that “narcissists” do. Taking a self-photograph isn’t always an exercise in self-love. Sometimes it is simply a convenient way to take a photo when no one else is around to take the snapshot.

But if a person wakes up in the morning, brushes their teeth, showers, and then takes 10-20 selfies to choose which one to post to Instagram that morning, it might just be a problem.



The Difference Between a Healthy and Unhealthy Selfie

Posting too many selfies to Facebook and Instagram is not only linked to narcissism, it can become an addiction. Some selfie addicts have even tried to commit suicide when unable to get just the “right” selfie.

What is the difference between simply taking a selfie and a selfie obsession?

1. Healthy Selfies Are Taken Infrequently

While there is no hard and fast rule on how much is too much, selfies definitely become problematic if they are posted too frequently. Posting a selfie on Facebook once every few months is very different from posting a new selfie every few hours or even every few days.

2. Healthy Selfies Often Include Other People, Animals, or Landmarks

Selfies that aren't all about self-aggrandizement will include other people, pets, or areas of interest...and maybe the person taking the "selfie" isn't the focus of the snapshot.

3. Healthy Selfies Often Have a Purpose

For a business owner who is trying to teach or share something useful or positive, taking selfies (particularly video selfies) may be part of the business. There is a fine line, however. Some "businesses" consist of people posting vanity shots to Instagram and making money from their large followings. Considering that there have been a few Instagram celebrities exposed as fakes, it's probably a good idea to get some personal background info on the people you follow on social media.

The Many Downsides of Posting Too Many Selfies

The paradox of selfies is they are often posted on social media to make a person "look good." In fact, they often generate the opposite effect than what was intended.

Here are just a few downsides to posting too many selfies:

1. Selfies Can Become an Addiction

Selfies can become addictive if people who constantly take selfies think that having "likes" is a measure of self-worth. Each time a new like is posted, it can be like a hit of cocaine to a person desperate for positive attention. The irony is that selfies actually make people less likable and less relatable, especially in regard to close family and friends who may know a different person than the one in the selfies.

2. It Can Hurt Relationships

The selfie addict needs to know: Research has shown that posting too many selfies makes people like the selfie-poster less.

3. It Can Hurt Job Prospects

Likewise, too many selfies can put a question mark in a potential employer's mind about hiring an individual...and can even cause the non-discerning selfie-poster to lose their current job.



3. Too Many Selfies May Create an Impression of Narcissism

The stereotype is that people who post selfies are “full of themselves” or outright narcissists. Often, however, someone who posts too many selfies can have low self-esteem.

According to one study, men who post a lot of selfies may be suffering from narcissism, but this is not as true for women. Either way, the irony is this: A person posting selfies because they desperately want to be liked is actually hurting their chances.

High Value, High-Status Facebook Posts

Now that selfies have gotten a reputation for being a sign of narcissism or self-aggrandizement, some are advocating for a different approach. Often discussed in relationship forums, the concept of a “high value, high status” Facebook profile refers to crafting intriguing, interesting Facebook content that lures people in without it appearing to be driven by a need for attention.

The concept has even spawned online courses about how to create an engaging Facebook persona that can even help garner more meaningful relationship prospects. In other words, if you want a high-value relationship, you should **show up as high-value** on your social media profiles. People who post too many selfies are generally considered to have a low-value profile.

Of course, if such techniques are used more and more frequently, chances are people will see through them as a way to manipulate opinion. However, a more restrained approach to social media posting will probably get better results than an overindulgence in selfies.

With Selfies, Moderation is Probably Best

The old adage “less is more” most definitely applies to selfies and social media. A modest, respectful approach to posting self-portraits on places like Facebook and Instagram may actually get a lot more mileage than constantly posting selfies several times a week or, worse, daily.

APA Reference

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