

I Love My Selfie: Shedding Light about Digital Narcissism on Social Media

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According to the Cambridge dictionary, narcissism means “a lot of interest and admiration for your own physical appearance and/or your own abilities.” The term came from Greek mythology and was studied by Sigmund Freud in order to explain the passage of autoerotism, (pleasure centered on himself) to the recognition and achievement of love in other objects.

The Greek myth describes Narcissus as a man who delights in his own beauty, reflected in a river and ends up drowning in an attempt to reach his own image in the waters.

Comparing the ancient Greek myth with the human behavior in our current society, we can say that we are living in a narcissistic era in which the figure of the Narcissus (before reflected in the waters of a river) has been replaced by the many selfies posted in the web. The main intention is to be admired and worshiped by hundreds of followers through the many likes achieved in the photos. The thing is that likes do not produce affection, but instead of this, build an inflated and a grandiose ego.

Selfie is a word that derives from the term self-portrait and is represented on the social media as a photograph that one takes of himself, making use of a mobile phone or a computer camera. Luciana Nunes, a Brazilian master in mental health, director of the Psicoinfo Institute and a researcher in technology and behavior, reports in the article “Selfie is a new way of expression and self-promotion” that “selfies gained relevance after the release of the cameras that transformed smartphones with internet connection in cameras”. In the popular culture for example, Selfie’s group led by presenter Ellen DeGeneres has clinched the Oscar of 2014, reaching more than 2.7 million shares on Twitter.

It is worth to consider that social media is just a part of our life and not the whole reality. The many images posted every single day on Facebook or Instagram cannot be able to tell our whole trajectory. In this way, just like in a comic book, our story (in the current narcissistic era) ends up being told in strips, in which every moment (of the photo) is selected based on the image that our ego aims to share. In the narcissistic era what the person craves is what determines the reality.

A narcissistic person is more concerned with the image he or she wants to convey than with what he/she truly feels. They present as main characteristic the desire for power and control over the people they aspire to impress, thus denying any feeling that contradicts the image he/she wishes to present. This occurs because he/she believes that is the main focus of attention and that his/her life arouses interest and curiosity in the followers.

The narcissist sees himself/herself as a unique, special and authentic person, desperately longing to garner “subjects for his/her reign.” However, what he/she does not realize is that in this world there are thousands of other narcissists who also compete for attention, in which *the screen is a great showcase of vanity*.

The number of replies in the Internet has to do with everything that feeds the ego, and in case of someone displeases or disagrees from them, the solution is to block or remove this person from the social media (without having to discuss the consequences of this decision). Under this bias, emerges from the internet the “digital narcissism” that is a crucial necessity of calling attention and being admired on the social media due to a post or a selfie. This means that everything that is shared or replied on social media deserves credit, attention and likes, a lot of likes.

Mirror, mirror of mine, is there anyone who receives more likes than I?

Digital narcissism: Implies in an overexploitation of the image through the postage of selfies, showing a glamorous and impeccable appearance on social media. It is also related with sharing incredible moments on Facebook or Instagram in an attempt to demonstrate happiness and a (false) sense of perfection in different moments of life. In this way, success is measured to the extent that a posting attracts the attention of many netizens in the cyberspace.

The digital narcissist feels an extremely sensation of excitement when he/she views countless likes in his/her posts and selfies. Instead of enjoying the company of other people or become glad in visiting different places in a trip, the Narcissus prefers to register these moments through selfies and postings on the social media. This occurs because their ego never gets tired and constantly needs to be caressed and exalted by the opinion of others. On the other hand, when there is no reply for a (new) photo or post, a sensation of anger and disappointment emerge from the narcissistic mind.

Alexander Lowen, an american psychoanalyst and writer, describes in his book “Narcissism” that narcissistic individuals do not love themselves, nor are capable of loving anyone else. Among the main causes of this personality trait (according to the author) are the “denial of feeling” and the rejection of the sense of self as a result of distorted development in childhood.

Selfies act as a mirror for the narcissist because they elucidate how people see and respond to his/her public image. Thus, feedback from publications serves as a sort of “social thermometer,” for it emits opinions about the person's physical image and appearance. In addition, exposing selfies provides that someone become present even in the absence, transforming the internaut into someone omnipresent through endless postings on social networks.

In a world of appearances in which humans values are measured by what one has and not what one is, the struggle for countless likes in the name of success and audience is essential. Thus, what genuinely matters on social networks nothing has to do with affection and friendship, but is related with the number of connections established on personal profile.

It is important to note that social media is a tool that allows us to give opinion about many subjects and more than ever we are becoming “critical citizens” in politics, education, fashion design, celebrities, career, money, etc. The current society is specialist in nothing because craves in replying about everything that appears in the internet. This occurs because digital narcissists have a profound necessity in criticizing as a form of:

- Projecting in another individual something that he/she does not accept in himself/herself. It may be a criticism to appearance, behavior, personality trait, attitude, etc.
- Expressing an incompatibility of ideas, values, positions and opinions.
- Having envy of someone else for not having (the same) fame, fortune, a pattern of beauty or the appearance of happiness presented in the other's postage.
- Trying to get over a low self-esteem or a complex of inferiority making negative comments on the social media about other person.

Although not considered a mental disorder, the act of taking selfies repeatedly can trigger in the person narcissistic traits. In addition, it may potentiate symptoms associated with depression, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder, addiction and body dysmorphia.

Researchers from Swansea University and Milan University, studied personality changes in individuals aged 18 to 34 over related to social media usage. They observed that about 20% of people may be at risk of developing such narcissistic traits associated with their excessive visual social media use. According to Professor Roberto Truzoli from Milan University: "The lack of immediate 'direct' social censure, may offer them the opportunity to inflict aspects of their narcissistic personality, present themselves in a grandiose manner, and realise fantasies of omnipotence".

To have an idea, here are some signs of digital narcissism that we can observe:

- Interest in knowing other's problems and issues, only with the intention of criticizing or taking advantage of someone.
- Constant need to get numerous likes in selfies or posts.
- Present inability to receive criticism, deleting or blocking from the social media any person who contradicts his/her ideas.
- Post selfies and/or constant information on any activity in which he/she is involved.
- Victimized himself/herself, blaming the other for actions committed by them.
- Post photos on philanthropic campaigns, auctions and charity events in an attempt to present (to the virtual community) an altruistic image of himself/herself.

As we can see, get in touch with one's own emotions has been increasingly difficult in the current narcissistic era. The fragility of the digital narcissist is not the social media. It's his/her ego. Narcissistic people have always existed and will always exist in our society. They present different life stories, distributed in different levels of narcissism (some of them are more, others less Narcissistic than others), but all present excessive admiration for himself/herself.

Values such as empathy, solidarity, love and respect for differences have been replaced by status, power and control through a world of appearances and influences. Our fingers has been replacing our voice because we don't have time anymore to talk, to listen and to understand, only to reply. Reply just the things that interests us and make our profile more influential in the digital world.

The thing is that cyberspace is an environment in which people can share (more easily and more agilely) images, events and messages about everything that happens day by day. Unlike real life, the virtual world allows to be selected the best moments in a person's life and this includes: parties, travels, achievements, "perfect body", among other events that arouse envy and comparison [1-6].

Social networks are just tools. The difference is in how these instruments are used, and in the case of social media, less is more.

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