

This academic study of people who post selfies confirms everything you suspect

By [Quentin Fottrell](#)

Published: July 17, 2015 8:19 a.m. ET



Shutterstock.com / georgemphoto

“Say cheese!” she said to herself.

Are you concerned by the number of people visiting tourist attractions wielding selfie sticks? And do you grow tired of the number of selfies appearing on social media sites? You’re not alone.

A backlash against selfies is afoot. Disney [DIS, -0.18%](#), which celebrates its 60th anniversary on Friday, is cracking down on selfies. This month, Disneyland Paris and Hong Kong Disneyland followed last month’s move by Disney’s U.S.-based theme parks by banning selfie sticks. The Sistine Chapel in Italy and Palace Museum in Beijing also recently banned them. The Coachella music festival in California, which took place in April, and the Lollapalooza festival in Chicago, which begins on July 31, banned them too. In fact, Coachella’s rules state: “No Selfie Sticks/No Narcissists.”

Read: [Selfie sticks and 5 other things banned at Disney resorts](#)

These venues may be doing these selfie-lovers a service. There is a dark side to people who constantly share photos of themselves online, an increasing body of research suggests. People who post selfies on social networks are more likely to exhibit what some psychologists call “the dark triad” of personality traits, according to two recent studies of nearly 1,200 men and women who completed personality tests and answered questions on their online habits. This dark triad consists of narcissism (extreme self-centeredness), Machiavellianism (manipulation of others) and psychopathy (acting impulsively with no regard for other people’s feelings).

Read: [10 things more annoying than selfie sticks](#)

“It’s not a wonderful personality constellation,” says Jesse Fox, assistant professor of communications at Ohio State University, and co-author of the study of 800 men — “[The Dark Triad](#)” — published in the April 2015 edition of *Personality and Individual Differences*, a peer-reviewed journal, and a similar paper studying 400 women, which will be presented at a conference in November and soon be submitted for publication. Narcissism and psychopathy predicted the actual number of selfies posted on sites like Facebook [FB, +4.53%](#) and Instagram, as did how often people edited photographs to be posted on social-networking sites.

Read: [Lonely people share too much on Facebook](#)

These findings are supported by a study of 400 men and women published last year in the journal *Social Networking*, a peer-reviewed quarterly academic journal that publishes studies on social relations. Although social media is primarily a tool for staying connected rather than self-promotion, it found there was one notable exception: The more people changed their profile picture, the more likely they were to report narcissistic traits. (The study also looked at the time they spent on Facebook and the words they used to rate their profile pictures.)

Is there a dark side to people who post selfies?

(3:01)

Quentin Fottrell and Lunch Break's Tanya Rivero discuss a new study on the 'dark triad' of personality traits of selfie-posters.

Posting, tagging and commenting on photos on Facebook were associated with respondents’ self-reported narcissism for both men and women, the study — “[Is Facebook Linked to Selfishness?](#)” — found. And posting frequent status updates and sharing links with a greater frequency were specifically linked with more narcissistic tendencies in women. The participants answered questions about both their social media habits and the Narcissistic Personality Index, a standard psychological test.

But sharing images on social media can have a positive impact on the networkers. It exposes people to the lives of others, their good times and bad times, says Tracy Packiam Alloway, associate professor at the University of North Florida in Jacksonville and co-author of the study. (Of course, people do tend to boast on social media, too.) And the ability to promote oneself with photos feeds narcissistic tendencies in those that are already very self-involved rather than actually turning selfless people into selfie-obsessed people. And correlation isn’t causation: These studies may show a connection, but don’t suggest that social networking actually causes people to be more narcissistic or Machiavellianism.

[Also see: 10 most annoying Facebook users](#)

“Never before in our history have we been able to talk to millions of people with a single picture,” says [Julie Hanks](#), owner and executive director of Wasatch Family Therapy in Salt Lake City. “In the past, we sought attention from people in our circle. Now we can seek approval from strangers and there’s more opportunity for narcissists to seek attention and validation.” But, she adds, this works both ways. “People who are empathetic in real life will be more likely to show more online too.”

It’s also easier to tweak and [improve photographs](#) today than it used to be. Adobe Photoshop once charged hundreds of dollars; it now charges \$9.99 a month for a desktop version. It competes with photo-retouching apps like Line Camera, which is free on Apple’s iOS and Google’s Android operating system, and FaceTune, which costs 99 cents for iOS and Android. Digital cameras also compete with smartphone apps with increasingly sophisticated—and easy-to-use—airbrushing settings.

But others caution against drawing a connection between people’s behavior online and their behavior in real life, and say everyone has a little bit of narcissism inside of them to help them get through the day. “You can see traits or tendencies to endorse certain things based on questionnaires,” says Julie Barnes, a New York-based clinical psychologist, “but you can’t diagnose anyone through them.” In psychological circles, she says, there is “healthy versus unhealthy” narcissism. (The former could damage relationships, the latter might be useful to get ahead in the workplace.) In the era of social networking, “everyone — whether consciously or unconsciously — is becoming a brand of themselves.”

More from MarketWatch

MarketWatch

Copyright ©2015 MarketWatch, Inc. All rights reserved.

By using this site you agree to the [Terms of Service](#), [Privacy Policy](#), and [Cookie Policy](#).

Intraday Data provided by SIX Financial Information and subject to [terms of use](#). Historical and current end-of-day data provided by SIX Financial Information. Intraday data delayed per exchange requirements. S&P/Dow Jones Indices (SM) from Dow Jones & Company, Inc. All quotes are in local exchange time. Real time last sale data provided by NASDAQ. More information on [NASDAQ traded symbols](#) and their current financial status. Intraday data delayed 15 minutes for Nasdaq, and 20 minutes for other exchanges. S&P/Dow Jones Indices (SM) from Dow Jones & Company, Inc. SEHK intraday data is provided by SIX Financial Information and is at least 60-minutes delayed. All quotes are in local exchange time.