

IS TAKING OF SELFIES A FORM OF MENTAL ILLNESS?

Recently, as is wont to happen, a document purporting to be from the American Psychiatric Association (APA) made the rounds on social media. In it, the APA is said to have confirmed that the taking of selfies is a form of mental illness. It claimed to spell out that there are three different levels of 'selfitis': borderline, acute and chronic, depending on how often one took selfies and posted them on social media.

The document further claimed that this obsessive disorder is brought about by the need to make up for a need in self-esteem and to fill a gap in intimacy.

Of course, a quick search on the Internet showed that this, like most stuff posted and shared on social media, was fake (and it originated from India, where it seems most of this fake stuff comes from). The APA pointed out on its website that there were actual and real mental disorders that needed attention and treatment, but that 'selfitis' was not one of them.

Maybe it is not officially a form of mental illness, but we all know that there is something not quite right with people who feel compelled to take pictures of themselves and share them with others, at times complete strangers.

A few years ago, a group of journalists from across Africa were taken to South Africa to discover and share the attractions of the country. Among the journalists was a female

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that was taken along because of her presence on social media and she was encouraged to share with her followers the places we visited.

But she spent the entire visit posting pictures of herself, albeit in the different places. But it was all about how she looked like, or what she was wearing. The client got so irritated that during the last few days, she was left at the hotel where we stayed (not that it made any difference, she continued

posting pictures of herself at the hotel, anyway. I understand she left 'journalism' soon after that and fled to public relations). We all agreed that she was not being cricket.

While growing up, we were taught (actually it was driven into us) that being vain was one of the worst things a person could be; and I think the Catholics have it as one of the deadly sins. It might not be in the Ten Commandments, but most religions frown on self-aggrandisement.

But these days, self-aggrandisement seems to be the rage, from it being considered okay for men to make themselves look pretty; to the President of the most powerful country in the world claiming all kinds of attributes that we all know are not true and can be disproved by a quick search. But that does not stop him from claiming he is the greatest thing to happen since history began.

And while it may not be officially declared a form of mental illness,



A young man takes a selfie on city street

selfie-taking can become very deadly. It was recently reported in the media how a group of teenagers on vacation drowned when their boat capsized because they all went to one side to take a selfie. It is estimated that at least 27 people died in India last year while taking selfies.

Selfie-taking is definitely a form of narcissism, which is defined as an excessive interest in one's physical appearance (the word is taken from the Greek myth of Narcissus, a handsome boy that is said to have fallen in love with his own reflection in a pool of water).

Experts explain while such people have an inflated sense of their own importance and a deep need for

admiration, they actually suffer from a fragile self-esteem.

Another dark side to selfies is that a whole generation might grow up thinking their self-worth depends on how many likes a selfie they shared got. Instead of being proud of coming first in class or being a sports star, young people might be longing for the perfect pout to become popular.

Of course, that will last as long as the next popular picture, which might inevitably lead to unhappiness and low self-confidence. So before you become too taken up with taking the perfect selfie, you might want to reflect that something might actually be wrong with you.