

Transcript for Professor Gernsbacher's Lecture Video: "On Selfies"

On Selfies. In November of two thousand and 13,

CLICK - the venerable Oxford Dictionaries acclaimed the word

CLICK - "Selfie" as the International Word of the Year (Oxford, 2013).

The achievement of International Word of the Year is given to QUOTE "a word or expression that has attracted a great deal of interest during the [previous] year," UNQUOTE

and, as the Oxford Dictionaries editors reported, the word "selfie" had indeed attracted a great deal of interest during the previous year; its frequency of use had increased by a phenomenal seventeen thousand percent during just that previous year.

And, during that previous year,

CLICK - Japanese astronaut, Akeo Mori, had posted a glorious selfie from the International Space Station. Visible in the reflection of the astronaut's helmet shield is our Earth, and our moon, and behind the astronaut is the greatest camera flash known to man – the sun.

A few months later, even more notoriety would be achieved for the diminutive six-letter word, selfie,

CLICK – When a selfie orchestrated by Ellen DeGeneres, which included Meryl Streep, Julia Roberts, Channing Tatum, Bradley Cooper, Kevin Spacey, Angelina Jolie, Brad Pitt, Lupita Nyong'o, Jared Leto, and Jennifer Lawrence at 86th Academy Awards, became the most retweeted image ever.

CLICK – We tend to associate selfies with celebrities such as Kim Kardashian, shown here not only taking a selfie with her baby North West, but also being photographed by her husband, Kanye West.

But did you know that

CLICK - Pope Francis is also quite fond of appearing in selfies, such as this selfie with youth at St. Peter's Basilica

CLICK – and this selfie with a family at the Solmoe Sanctuary in South Korea,

CLICK – and this selfie during a lunch meeting.

CLICK – Perhaps because of our front-facing cameras, now standard on most all smartphones and laptops, or perhaps because of our affinity for websites like Instagram and apps like Snapchat, we erroneously deem the current generation the Selfie Generation.

But humans have been fond of taking selfies for many centuries, way, way before the Internet. For example,

CLICK – In 1966, British musician and Beatles member George Harrison took a selfie in front of the Taj Mahal, with a fish-eye lens, no less.

CLICK – In 1966, U.S. astronaut Buzz Aldrin, the second person to ever walk on the moon, took a selfie during one of his famed space walks (Chang, 2015)

CLICK – And in 1960, iconic U.S. journalist Hunter Thompson, then only 22 years old, took a selfie while on vacation at San Juan, Puerto Rico.

CLICK – For as long as humans have been able to hold a camera out in front of themselves, they have often turned the camera on themselves to take selfies.

CLICK – Even if the cameras were so rudimentary and cumbersome, that they required two people to hold them, as in this 1920s selfie of five photographers on the roof of Marceau’s Studio in New York City.

CLICK – Before front-facing cameras appeared on all of our smartphones, many people, like yea, Justin Bieber, took selfies in the mirror. But even that practice was nothing new.

CLICK – Back in 1954, Jackie Kennedy, who was a professional photographer before marrying John Kennedy and subsequently becoming First Lady of the United States, took a selfie in a mirror. Forty years earlier,

CLICK – In 1914, teenage Grand Duchess Anastasia, daughter of Tsar Nicholas the Second, who was the last sovereign ruler of Imperial Russia, took a selfie using a mirror.

CLICK – As did this unidentified woman in 1900. Around this time, many painters and artists experimented with mirrors to take photographic selfies,

CLICK – For example, Belgian painter Henri Even-pole set up a tripartite mirror to capture this selfie 1898

CLICK – And Australian painter Harold Kaz new, who took this selfie in 1910, experimented with selfies, or as they were known back then, self-portraits, as a form of serious artistic expression.

Indeed, it might surprise you to learn that one of the earliest photographs EVER taken was indeed a selfie.

CLICK – In August, 1839, Lewie Duh-gare announced the invention of photography using a contraption later named in his honor. Just two months after the invention was announced in 1839, a young Philadelphian, Robert Cornelius, took what is considered one of the very first portraits.

CLICK – It was a selfie. This early style of photography required a long exposure time, sometimes as long as fifteen or twenty minutes. Of standing absolute, perfectly still, not moving a muscle or a hair, or the photo would be blurry.

Given the long, treasured history of selfies, indeed, a history that closely parallels the invention of photography itself, it is curious that current day society assumes that taking self-photographs is not only something new, but also something indicative of a pathological personality.

CLICK – In January two thousand and fifteen, the Huffington Post reported that a study

CLICK - links selfies to narcissism and psychopathy.

As you might know, narcissism is defined as QUOTE extreme selfishness, with a grandiose view of one's own talents and a craving for admiration UNQUOTE and psychopathy is defined as QUOTE a mental disorder in which an individual manifests amoral and antisocial behavior, a lack of ability to love or establish meaningful personal relationships, and extreme egocentricity.

So, Huffington Post was saying that supposedly taking selfies is linked to manifesting amoral and antisocial behavior, to lacking the ability to love or establish meaningful personal relationships, to being extremely selfish, and to having a grandiose view of one's own talents.

The report of this study in

CLICK – USA Today, narrowed the findings down a bit.

CLICK - It's MEN, not just everyone but **MEN** who take selfies who may be psychopaths. This same conclusion was also publicized by

CLICK – Fox2Now of St. Louis: **MEN** who take selfies may be psychopaths

CLICK - MTV News further specified that

CLICK - it's guys who post **A LOT** of selfies who are more likely to be psychopaths.

CLICK - TIME magazine softened the claims just a bit to say that

CLICK – It's men who share selfies **ONLINE** who show more signs of psychopathy, and according to the

CLICK – Chicago Tribune it's men who post lots of selfies who **MAY** have psychopathic traits.

Well, what did the research study actually do and find?

CLICK - The study administered an online survey to 800 U.S. males, age 18 to 40.

CLICK - The survey included 4 items presumed to measure narcissistic traits, such as “I tend to want others to pay attention to me” or “I tend to seek prestige or status”

CLICK - The survey also included 4 items presumed to measure psychopathic traits, such as “I tend to be cynical” or “I tend to be callous or insensitive.” Although let me say that cynicism is a long way off from psychopathy.

CLICK – On one item, participants guesstimated how much time they spent each day on social media sites.

CLICK – On another item, participants guesstimated how many selfies they posted to social media sites last week; note that the mean was less than one selfie per participant, or about one selfie every other week.

CLICK – And on another item, participants guesstimated how many OTHER pictures they posted to social media sites last, and the mean was about 1.5 OTHER pictures posted each week per participant.

As for the results?

CLICK - If we examine the proportion of variance in number of posted selfies, we see that

CLICK - The participants' age explains zero percent of the variance

CLICK - Another variable, participants' self-rating of self-objectification explains less than one percent of the variance

CLICK - participants' self-rating of their machiavellenism explains less than three percent of the variance

CLICK – Similarly, participants' self-rating of their psychopathy explains less than three percent of the variance in how many selfies they post. Recall that this is the variable that got so much play in the media, which reported that MEN who take selfies may be psychopaths.

CLICK – Participants' self-rating of their narcissism also explains precious little, less than four percent, of the variance in how many selfies they post.

CLICK – as does the amount of time that participants spend on social media sites and apps.

CLICK – But there is one clear, big winner. One variable that explains a lot, one variable that explains a whopping 34% of the variance in how many selfies men post. You know what that variable is?

CLICK – The number of OTHER photos these men post on social media. So basically, what we have in these data is not that men who post a lot of selfies are narcissistic or are psychopathic. But rather men who post a lot of selfies also post a lot of OTHER pictures.

CLICK – I am reminded of the great Dutch painter

CLICK - Vincent van Gogh.

CLICK – During the late 1800s

CLICK – Vincent Van Gogh painted over 3 dozen self-portraits.

CLICK – Selfies.

CLICK – Over Three dozen.

CLICK - Selfies

CLICK – Vincent Van Gogh also created over 2000 paintings and drawings and is known as one of the most prolific artists ever. Some of Van Gogh's thousands of paintings and drawings were

CLICK - Selfies.