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Beyond the selfie obsession

A few years ago, the word selfie didn't feature in our everyday parlance, till the Oxford English Dictionary announced it as the "International Word of the Year 2013", noting its frequency in the English language had increased 17,000 per cent in a year. After that, rest is history as poses ranging from discrete pouting, to the 'duck' face, to the funny-trying-to-be-cute face have inundated our social media feeds. This has been such a worldwide phenomenon that from celebrities to the common man, everyone seems to be bitten by the selfie bug.

Although usually is a harmless activity, it can turn into a nagging habit which may become extreme in certain cases. In such cases, this excessiveness can hint at the slow manifestation of an underlying mental illness, where the person - regardless of the appropriateness of the place and time indulges in a selfie.

A recent case of this inappropriateness, which was widely condemned on the social media, comes from Saudi Arabia where a teenager clicked a selfie with him sticking out his tongue next to body of his dead grandfather, with the caption 'Goodbye, Grandfather'. Incidents like such raise pertinent questions like "Is taking excessive selfies a normal behaviour?" or "Can it be called narcissism?"

"The 'selfie habit' has picked up to a great extent and has almost gathered epidemic proportions as a worldwide phenomenon. It is a manifestation of our society's gradual drift towards individualisation with a paradoxically coexistent need to be constantly connected to as many people as possible," Dr Shwetank Bansal, consultant psychiatrist, Better Me - Mental Health Services, informs *Metrolife*.

"Though it lies largely within the realms of normalcy, in some people it has been seen to go out of hand, in turn causing significant distress and interfering with the overall quality of life. These manifestations are especially being seen in the younger population, with the explosion in the use of social networking websites acting as a catalyst," adds Bansal.



CONTAGIOUS Everyone seems to be bitten by the bug.

This streak of self-obsession has become prominent ever since social networking sites like *Facebook* and *Instagram* allowed people to remain in touch with each other. These platforms also provided an opportunity to people to share their pictures, little knowing, it would give rise to a generation that is quick to update "status" and calculate their popularity by the number of "likes" they got.



"Being self obsessed might be in one's personality. But excessive of anything is harmful and so is in the case of selfies. Too much of clicking may end up as addiction," points out Dr Manju Goswami, psychiatrist, Max Hospital, Pitampura.

Neha Rathi, a MA final year student says, "I appreciate the way I look and also like to flaunt that. It pleases me when someone clicks my photograph. But people get irritated if you ask them to click your photographs frequently. So when technology allows us to help ourselves why to hesitate? I can now take endless number of photos and post them."

Unknowingly, this self-admiration can result into something grave. As Bansal points out, "In certain cases, individuals experience a constant, unyielding urge to carry out the activity of clicking their picture, with any attempt to stop themselves. This results in a sense of great distress and discomfort."

In such cases, he says, on detailed evaluation it may be seen that it is occurring as one of the manifestations of Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD), and needs treatment accordingly.

"Certain other cases have been identified the world over, in whom excessive selfie clicking was found to be associated with Body Dysmorphic disorder, with the pictures serving as a reassurance of how one looks. Some studies have also linked narcissistic personality disorder with frequent, uncontrollable selfie taking behaviour, generally fuelled by self admiration," he further elaborates.

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