



Insight and Inspiration,  
Innovation and Vision  
For the Developing and  
Evolving Self

# INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR SELF DEVELOPMENT

## Newsletter

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### Selfies: Purpose, Identity, and Image

Selfies are interesting. Let's explore some aspects of selfies and use this phenomenon to understand a bit about identity and image, two crucial aspects of the self.

Taking a picture of one's self is a new phenomenon made possible by new technologies. Photography in general captures a moment in time as an image, a moment that we value and think that others might also value. When we take a picture, we have a purpose in mind. Taking selfies is generally fun and can enrich our life. People are being playful as they take a selfie. They smile and laugh. When selfies are a light-hearted activity we experience happiness and joy.

#### PURPOSE

What is the purpose of taking a selfie, of taking a picture of myself?

These purposes can be:

- To laugh, smile, and have fun
- To highlight the importance of a moment in my life
- To celebrate an accomplishment
- To "document for posterity," and for myself, my presence—my existence
- To take a selfie with others, sharing a moment of happiness and joy
- To send a selfie, sharing a moment of happiness and joy with others
- To admire myself, my beauty, and my appearance
- To increase my sense of self by recognizing the beauty of my appearance
- To reflect my aliveness back to me
- To express my creativity
- To acknowledge the importance of a place I am visiting
- To acknowledge the importance of the people I am with
- To see myself as I am
- To know and to love me
- To recognize my self-worth and self-esteem

**Practice:** Fill a selfie moment with self-appreciation and celebration. Tune into the happiness and joy that can be present.

#### Selfies: Purpose, Identity, and Image

Selfies: Introduction  
Purpose of Taking a Selfie  
Ability of the Month: Self-  
Awareness  
Identity  
Image  
The Dark Side: Misuse and  
Abuse of Selfies

Next Month: Selfies,  
Narcissim, and the Search  
for Self-Love



**ABILITY OF THE MONTH:** To be self-aware. In order to do this, there has to be two of us, the ego and the self. In being self-aware we use our ego to step outside of our self and to look at our self. Our ego takes a selfie of our self.

## **IDENTITY AND IMAGE**

We want to know who we are. We seek answers to the question: "Who am I?" Our identity and image are a big part of the answer to that question. Pictures of our self are information about our self. A picture of yourself helps you to know who you are.

### **Identity**

Identity is a collection of ideas about who we are that determine what we think, feel and do, as we fulfil a role. Identity is formed by the process of identification, building the self by becoming like another person. For example: *what I think, feel, and do (my identity) about selfies is created by my observations of others taking selfies.* I then (mostly unconsciously) decide that:

- People taking selfies seem to be having fun.
- I want to have that fun.
- I see that I am good at selfies and that it provides certain gratifications.

Then, reinforcing the identity and behavior occurs.

- I become close to friends when we take selfies together, adding to our group identity.
- My family enjoys the selfies that I post. That enjoyment brings us closer, reinforcing family identification.
- My little brother has come to me, "the selfie expert," for instructions about taking selfies.
- Even though I am unaware of them, there are several purposes and gratifications that selfies serve for me. This increases my motivation to take selfies and solidifies my identity as a selfie taker.

This example illustrates the process of forming an identity, and shows how that identity influences what we think about ourselves and what we do. This process has been occurring throughout our lives and will continue in the future.

**Point of Empowerment:** *Identification, identity formation, and identity create your life.*

**Practice:** *To start working with identity, pick a simple activity, like photography or selfie taking. See where your interest or lack of interest comes from. "People enjoy selfies." Or, "I see myself as a nonconformist (like my father) and therefore rebel against taking selfies." Reinforce the identification by acknowledging it. Or, change the identification. "I see the fun in taking selfies. I no longer need to rebel like my father. I am now free to take selfies if I want to. This change in identity has given me new choices and more freedom." (For more about changing an identity, see: The Operating Manual for the Self, Creating New Identifications, pages 260-262.)*

**Practice:** *Look at a selfie for the purpose of determining "who in the family do I look like." Think about his or her good qualities. If you also have those good qualities, recognize them in yourself, and allow that recognition to build your self-esteem.*

### **Image**

From the point of view of the new self-psychology, here is a complex but very useful definition of an image. An image is composed of thoughts, feelings, beliefs, attitudes, decisions, memories, and expectations for the future. We have images about every aspect of our lives, including images about our self.

**Point of Empowerment:** *Images shape our lives by determining what our behavior is going to be every moment of our life.*

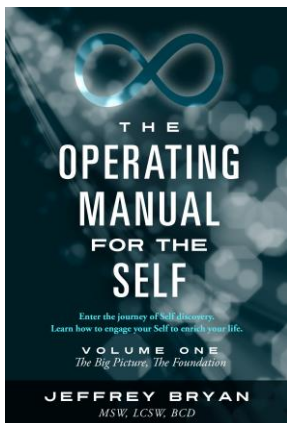
**Point of Empowerment:** *The collection of images about our self forms our self-image, what we think about ourselves and therefore how we feel about ourselves. This profoundly colors our experience of life.*

We can explore an image by choosing a topic in the form of "me and. . .": Me and my sister, Me and my family, Me and my work, or Me and my neighborhood. We then use free association, letting go of control of our thoughts and feelings so that they flow freely, without censoring them, writing them down. Let's apply this process to explore the image, "Me and Selfies."

“Taking selfies is so much fun. I smile and feel great. When I post them, everyone gets to see what I am doing. I love sharing my life in this way. Sometimes a selfie can make me feel sad. Someone else can take my selfie for me. It’s good, but sometimes I put on a fake smile. I can’t stand a fake smile, but sometimes I must fool myself and the other person. I usually like the way I look in a selfie. Sometimes I hate the way I look. Sometimes I get obsessed and have to take as many selfies as I can because I love trying to understand me through my pictures. I remember hating the pictures my parents took of me because I was often unhappy and they insisted that I smile. It was so fake, but they thought we always had to appear happy.”

We can see that an honest self-exploration of the image “me and selfies,” reveals different aspects of the person. Some aspect makes us feel good about our self. But, this can be the first step in a self-exploration that points to way to issues that a person needs to resolve. This kind of image work leads to personal growth.

**Practice:** *Locate an aspect of yourself that you are curious about or that causes you pain. Write out the image of this aspect. Writing out your image in deep self-acceptance, will stimulate growth and healing.*




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**The Operating Manual for the Self contains everything you want to know about identity and image, but are afraid to ask.**

[Manualfortheself.com](http://Manualfortheself.com)

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### THE DARK SIDE OF SELFIES: MISUSE AND ABUSE

We have explored the positive motivations and constructive functions of selfies, (the Right Amount/use category (#1) in the analytical matrix). However, we have the phrase, “too much of a good thing.” The refers to obsession with selfies and to faulty motivations, (categories 2, 3, 4, and 5). Never taking a selfie (Too little, categories 6, 7) can indicate self-neglect. For example:

- As I take selfies I check out my appearance, which is the most important aspect of who I am. My identity is my appearance.
- I am obsessed with my physical beauty, hoping it will compensate for my feeling of ugliness.
- I am hoping that selfies will relieve me of this painful feeling of being invisible.
- When I take selfies, I paste a false smile on my face, hoping to feel happy. But the truth is that I am sad and depressed much of the time.
- When I don’t like the selfies I have taken, I feel that I am just like my mother: “I can't do anything right.”
- I never take a selfie thinking that I am not worth the effort (having little self-worth).

Here we are using selfies to cope with disturbances of the self. We are compensating, seeking to add what is missing in our lives, and correcting our “faults and weakness.”

Understanding a few misuses and abuses of selfies points us in the direction of next month’s exploration of selfies and narcissism.

Analytical Matrix	Use	Misuse	Abuse
Too much		4	5
Right Amount	1	2	3
Too Little		6	7

### CONCLUSION

We have explored various aspects of selfies and their relationship to the self. Our goal here is to become more aware: aware of the meaning of our actions, and of the importance of identity and image. Next month we will further explore the dark side of selfies—narcissism, but will discover that the underlying issue is self-love, something everyone struggles with.

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