

# The Good, The Bad, and The Selfie

*SFX: iPHONE CAMERA SHUTTER, MUSIC FADES IN UNDER THE SHUTTER NOISE, IT'S A POSITIVE, SIMPLE ACOUSTIC GUITAR PLUCKING THAT MOVES AT A STEADY PACE.*

## Narration 1:

Our feeds are flooded with them; Facebook and Instagram are crawling with them, Snapchat has revolutionized them. They feature duck lips, CGI flower crowns, and sepia filters. And, according to rumour, *[SFX: MUSIC FADES OUT]* they also cause narcissism, low self-esteem, and take us out of reality. *[BEAT, SFX: SHUTTER]*

*SFX: MUSIC FADES BACK IN*

With the invention of the front-facing camera came the dawn of a new era of photography. Selfies have replaced emoticons in text messages and family portraits in photo albums. Some might say that this new mode of photography is only fostering vanity and distracting us from the real-world, as some authors like Sherry Turkle suggest.

This obviously paints a bad picture (no pun intended), but can selfies really be all that bad? In response to Turkle's article, Jason Feifer writes that "We're witnessing a new normal," and then goes on to list other "grumpy seniors" who, at the cusp of other technological advancements, warned against the dangers that they foresaw. Feifer then points out that we turned out just fine.

So, the debate seems pretty simple; *[SFX: MUSIC FADES OUT]* are selfies good or bad?

This is The Good, The Bad, and The Selfie.

*SFX: SHUTTER, MUSIC FADES BACK IN*

I asked a friend of mine, Stephanie, a former model and current world-traveler, for her insights. If you saw her Snapchat story you would see her always looking camera-ready and visiting exotic places. I thought, for sure, she would have noticed if selfies had had a negative impact on her.

*SFX: MUSIC FADES OUT*

## CLIP 1: STEPHANIE AND MADELINE

**Madeline:** So, when would you take a selfie?

**Stephanie:** When I think I look good [giggles]. When I'm in a good mood and I feel I look good Or I'm doing something exciting like traveling, you know at the Colosseum. Or I'm at a party with my friends and I want to take a group photo or something.

**Madeline:** Okay, so when you were a model did you have a different attitude towards selfies?

**Stephanie:** Uh, that's a—that's a good question. [pause] No.

**Madeline:** No? It was still about you feeling good?

**Stephanie:** Yeah, it was just about capturing the moment. Like, it was just about remembering—it's like a timeline, like I feel like my photos are like a timeline remembering things and capturing that moment so you can look back on it and reflect.

*SFX: MUSIC FADES BACK IN, MORE QUIZICAL TONE*

**Narration 2:**

Not quite what I was expecting. I remember a few years ago hearing rumours that vilified selfies, blaming them for narcissistic behaviour and decreased self-esteem, and I believed them. I have to admit that I always feel a little bit guilty when I snap a picture of myself looking good, wondering if I'm becoming more self-absorbed with every shot. I thought for sure an industry like fashion would only amplify these negative effects. But the way Stephanie put it, selfies are just pictures, and pictures are meant to capture a moment. *[SFX: MUSIC FADES OUT]* So, what's wrong with that?

*BEAT*

*SFX: MUSIC FADES BACK IN*

That was the opinion of a selfie queen. What about someone who wouldn't describe themselves as an avid selfie taker?

**Clip 2: GALEN**

**Galen:** We'll say if 100 was whole life documented and 0 was never taking a selfie I'd probably be around 30%.

**Narration 3:**

My friend Galen has spent the last year and a half living and working in the UK, and has done quite a bit of traveling in between. Before I spoke to him I had a look through some of the photos he has posted of his travels and I found one with the caption "You don't know the pursuit of the perfect selfie until you stand in rush hour French traffic."

*SFX: MUSIC FADES OUT*

**Clip 3: GALEN AND MADELINE**

**Madeline:** Who's the person you tagged in that post?

**Galen:** Oh, that's Tom. That's the guy who actually taught me selfies. Well, so my buddy Tom, we're really good friends, he's like 6'4"/6'5", 250lbs, shredded like a Greek God, and he loved selfies. He became known as the king of selfies but we all laughed about it. And in all honesty, I started taking selfies more so for the ironic part of it as a spin-off to him.

**Madeline:** So, when you think about what that picture captures, what was most important in that picture? Is it the Arc de Triomphe in the background or was it the lengths that you went to to get that photo?

**Galen:** I mean, yes to all, and even because I knew I was doing it in the context of it being an ironic thing it was also looking forward to the joke I was able to make with the people who aren't necessarily part of the experience. So, A) yes, I'm next to a landmark that I'm able to look and laugh at for forever now. B) is the experience of then actually the story of how I got it and the people I met there, because I talked to a few people once I got there. So, actually taking the photo and the residual experience of being able to tag people and have them experience it, or experience it in their own way, even though they weren't there.

*SFX: MUSIC FADES BACK IN, MORE LIGHT-HEARTED, STILL QUIZZICAL*

#### **Narration 4:**

**That was something else I hadn't thought of; that selfies are for more than just showing off, they can serve as a bridge, a new way to share experiences. Instead of flipping through someone's photo album, we're scrolling through their Facebook timeline. This reminded me of another selfie on Galen's feed, one we took together.**

*SFX: MUSIC TRANSITIONS FROM GUITAR TO SUBTLE CHRISTMASY BELLS*

**Last Christmas Galen and I were both living in London, hundreds of miles away from our families, along with friends who were all in the same boat. So, instead of skipping the festivities, we had an "Orphan's Christmas" and invited anyone we knew didn't have family to celebrate with. And we took our own little family portrait to remember the day.**

*SFX: BELLS FADE OUT*

#### **Clip 4: GALEN**

**Galen:** Yeah, it's an orphan family portrait more than anything. There's a couple of different messages you can derive from it. 1) We're all having a really good time on Christmas. 2) Any one of our families that was worried about us being alone on Christmas is now relieved because they can physically see us having a good time with other people on the day. So, it just documents a very memorable Christmas. And it took, what, I think five minutes, because it actually sucked trying to get everyone on that damn staircase, to take a good photo.

*SFX: GUITAR FADES IN, EXCITED*

#### **Narration 5:**

**The debate I'd set out to end, are selfies good or bad, was only unearthing more questions. According to Stephanie, her selfies make her feel good, according to Galen, his selfies are an inside joke and bring his friends together.**

These personal experiences and insights were mind opening, but they didn't give me facts about the psychological impacts that selfies may be having, the ones we don't notice as selfie-takers. *[SFX: MUSIC OUT]* I needed a scientific perspective, so, I spoke to Dr. Catherine Rawn of UBC's Psychology Department.

#### Clip 5: DR. RAWN AND MADELINE

**Madeline:** I remember when selfies started to become a thing there were all kinds of rumours saying it causes narcissistic behaviour, it lowers your attention span. Do you think these are cause for concern at all, these findings?

**Dr. Rawn:** Not in general, because they're correlational, right? So that correlation between narcissism and psychopathy and selfie posting, that may not be causal at all, in fact I'd be very surprised if selfie posting was causing psychopathy. When we just measure two things together and see if they go together we're not able to say one way or the other that one is causing the other. There might be some third variable going on that's driving both of those actions.

*SFX: GUITAR FADES BACK IN, EXCITED AS BEFORE*

#### Narration 6:

So, selfies don't *cause* mental disorders, those rumours can be put to bed. But do they have their negative side-effects like Sherry Turkle believes, or *are* we just "witnessing the new normal?"

*SFX: MUSIC FADES OUT*

#### Clip 6: DR. RAWN

**Dr. Rawn:** I think the answer's gonna have to be both. And it's gonna depend. It's gonna depend on the person's motivations for posting selfies, it's gonna depend on the context. It's gonna be a much more complicated answer than it's good or it's bad. It's gonna be "When is it good? When is it not so good? Why, and for whom?" I mean, there's no one easy answer. I mean, these questions for me are just raising for me just how complicated I think it will be to figure out.

*SFX: MUSIC FADES BACK IN, A BIT LESS EXCITING, STILL OPTIMISTIC*

#### Narration 7:

I think Dr. Rawn is right. I don't think that the selfie phenomenon is good or bad, I think it depends on the person in front of the camera. When I look at that "Orphan Family Portrait" that I found on Galen's timeline, I see a girl in the photo at the top of the stairs who's on her phone, her face obscured by the glare of her screen. I don't remember her name, or who invited her, and I think she left before the end of the night. The only proof that she was there at all is in that selfie.

**This, to me, perfectly illustrates the conclusion I seem to have come to: a selfie is just a picture, but like all pictures, it's meant to preserve a memory. If you obsessively count your likes and shares you miss out on the genuine experiences photos are meant to immortalize. So, keep snapping selfies, but snap with purpose.**

*BEAT*

***SFX: SHUTTER, MUSIC HITS LAST NOTE AND DIES OUT***