



## Full length article

## Sex differences in online selfie posting behaviors predict histrionic personality scores among men but not women

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## ABSTRACT

The common usage and novelty of social media is reflected in the emergence of many new psychological phenomena. Here, we explored the relationship between number of uploaded selfies (a self-portrait photograph of oneself) and individual personality differences that are likely to be related with self-promoting behavior, i.e., histrionic personality. A total of 748 people (355 women and 393 men) completed a self-assessment questionnaire on histrionic personality, self-assessed physical and interpersonal attractiveness, and reported the numbers of three types of selfies (selfies alone, selfies with a group, and selfies with a romantic partner) posted within the last month to any type of social media. We found that females posted more own and group selfies (but not selfies with a partner) than did males. Relationships between histrionic personality and the number of selfies were statistically significant only for men. We discuss our results in the context of social media related gender differences and self-presentation.

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## 1. Introduction

The last few years have witnessed a growing popularity in online social media usage (Chou, Hunt, Beckjord, Moser, & Hesse, 2009; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Today, Facebook is used by 1.35 billion people, Instagram by 300 million and Twitter by 284 million. Common uses of social media and the temporal novelty of this type of media are reflected in the emergence of many new social phenomena and trends (Back et al., 2010; Błachnio, Przepiórka, & Rudnicka, 2013; Houghton & Joinson, 2010; Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012; Ross et al., 2009). Some of these phenomena have largely not been investigated empirically, including the online posting of selfie photographs (i.e. self-portrait photographs of oneself).

A selfie has recently been defined as, "a self-portrait photograph of oneself (or of oneself and other people), taken with a camera or a

camera phone held at arm's length or pointed at a mirror, which is usually shared through social media" (Sorokowski et al., 2015). According to this definition, and consistent with real-life observations, selfies include not only self-portraits alone, but also photos of oneself with a romantic partner or a group of friends or acquaintances.

The first photographic selfies are said to have been taken by an American amateur photographer Robert Cornelius and an English inventor Charles Wheatstone around the year 1840 (Wade, 2014). However, this type of photo did not become popular until the twenty-first century with the rise of social media. Internet sources suggest that the word selfie was first used in the year 2002, and already in 2013, it was chosen as Oxford Dictionaries Word of the Year ("selfie", 2015a, b). A recent increase in popularity of this phenomenon is overwhelming – studies show that the number of selfies posted in social media increased over 900 times from 2012 (Souza et al., 2015).

Selfies are taken and posted to social media by millions of people every day, but surprisingly, there are only a few scientific studies on selfies. For example, two studies examined photographic composition (Bruno & Bertamini, 2013; Bruno, Gabriele, Bertamini, & Tasso, 2014). Others assessing trait predictors of social

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networking site usage (Fox & Rooney, 2015; Sorokowska et al., 2016; Sorokowski et al., 2015; Weiser, 2015). In the latter group of studies, the authors found that narcissism (Fox & Rooney, 2015; Sorokowski et al., 2015; Weiser, 2015) and psychopathy (Fox & Rooney, 2015) predicted number of posted selfies, especially among men, whereas extraversion and social exhibitionism were related frequency of selfie posting in men and women (Sorokowska et al., 2016). Recent studies also indicate, that selfies might constitute a basis for inferences about target's personality (Qiu, Lu, Yang, Qu, & Zhu, 2015). These few studies cannot, however, fully explain who takes selfie photographs and why, and does not address a number of other potentially important psychological and social determinants of posting selfies. In the present study, we explore the relationship between posting selfies and a type of personality that is likely to be related with self-promoting behavior, i.e. histrionic personality. The previous studies showed that there is a consistent gender difference in frequency of selfie posting in favor for women (Sorokowska et al., 2016; Sorokowski et al., 2015; Weiser, 2015), therefore our research makes an attempt to address not only the relationship between histrionic personality and selfie posting behavior, but also aims at exploring gender differences with this regard.

Histrionic Personality is present in both the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD 11; group: F60.4; World Health Organization, 1992) and the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM V; 301.50; American Psychiatric Association, 2013). The most important characteristics of histrionic personality include constant attention seeking, emotional overreaction, and suggestibility. People with Histrionic Personality tend to engage in exhibitionistic behaviors as a means of securing attention and favors. They may crave stimulation and are often perceived by others as dramatic and shallow. For example, these individuals may make frequent loud comments, wear socially inappropriate outfits, exaggerate their behaviors and express strong emotions. They often describe themselves as attractive and charming and may exhibit sexually provocative behaviors. Individuals with Histrionic Personality are often high functioning, both socially and professionally, portraying good social skills despite being easily influenced by others and tending to use their skills to manipulate others (Apt & Hurlbert, 1994; Dorfman, 2010; Millon & Davis, 1996; Shedler & Westen, 2004).

We hypothesize that people exhibiting histrionic personality traits post more selfies compared to people whose personality is not histrionic. This hypothesis is tested in the present study.

## 2. Materials and methods

### 2.1. Participants

Our sample comprised a total of 748 people (355 women and 393 men) aged between 17 and 47 years ( $M = 21.64$ ;  $SD = 3.41$ ). Participants were recruited from various university campuses and vocational schools in Poland and they constituted a sample of convenience. The participants were: full-time students, part-time students (with regular employment during the week) and students' partners/family members. All participants provided informed consent prior to their inclusion in the study.

### 2.2. Measures

All participants completed a self-assessment questionnaire on histrionic personality. The questionnaire is part of the Structured Clinical Interview for DSM-IV Axis II (SCID II) (Gibbon, Spitzer, & First, 1997), used for the assessment of histrionic personality disorder. According to the authors (Gibbon et al., 1997) the

questionnaire (without an in-depth interview) might be used as a screening tool for HPD. The scale consists of seven questions, for example, "Do you often try to seduce other people?" and "Do you try to attract attention by your outfit or your looks?". Possible scores can range from 1 to 7, with higher scores indicating a higher tendency toward histrionic personality traits. In our study, we used the Polish adaptation of the questionnaire (Zawadzki, Popiel, & Pragłowska, 2010). The reliability of the histrionic personality measurements used in this study, assessed in terms of internal consistency, was high (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .72$ ; due to binary measurement of each item,  $\alpha$  was estimated on a matrix of polychoric correlations, see Flora & Curran, 2004; Olsson, 1979).

Additionally, participants responded to two items that measured their self-assessed physical and interpersonal attractiveness ("I think I am physically attractive" and "I think people like me") by providing a response on a scale from 1 (I definitely disagree) to 7 (I definitely agree). Participants also provided their age, sex, and the total number of pictures they had posted or shared with the use of social media. We asked for quantities of three categories of selfies: own selfies; selfies with a romantic partner; and group selfies (i.e. taken with one or more individuals, excluding the romantic partner). Thus, we measured self-assessed number of selfies posted within the last month to all types of social media (including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Whatsapp).

### 2.3. Procedure

Participants completed a questionnaire assessing their personality (described above) and a survey designed to assess their selfie-sharing activity during the previous month (the participants counted the numbers of the three categories of selfies and number of photos excluding selfies, that they had posted on social media). Questionnaires were completed by the participants at home and submitted to the researchers in a sealed envelope on a scheduled day. All participants provided informed consent prior to their inclusion in the study and were not compensated for their participation. They completed the questionnaires individually and they were ensured about the anonymity of their responses.

## 3. Results

The number of reported selfies was highly variable and skewed: Participants reported uploading anywhere from 0 to 350 own selfies during the past 30 days to all social media sites ( $M = 4.88$ ,  $SD = 23$ ); 0 to 100 selfies with a partner ( $M = 1.48$ ,  $SD = 6.12$ ); 0 to 200 group selfies ( $M = 4.29$ ,  $SD = 17.34$ ) and 0 to 450 total selfie-type photographs ( $M = 10.65$ ,  $SD = 38.40$ ). The reported number of posted images excluding selfies ranged from 0 to 1400 ( $M = 19.69$ ,  $SD = 84.11$ ) (Table 1). Due to the high degree of skewness observed in our main variables of interests, we have used both non-parametric correlation coefficients (Spearman's rank order correlation or  $\rho$ ), as well as Pearson's  $r$  on log-transformed variables for comparative purposes.

As predicted, posting selfies was significantly correlated with histrionic personality, with a small-to-medium effect size (Cohen, 1992). Specifically, histrionic personality was strongly related to the posting of own and group selfies ( $r_s = .31$  and  $.28$  respectively) and more weakly to the number of posted selfies with a partner ( $r = .18$ , growing to  $r = .20$  when calculated only among people declaring being in the romantic relationship; all  $p_s < .001$ ). The correlation between aggregated total number of posted selfies ( $\alpha = .75$ ) and histrionic personality was robust ( $r = .33$ , Spearman's  $\rho = .32$ , both  $p_s < .001$ ), which translates into  $r = .45$  after correction for attenuation (Thorndike, 1949). Posting selfies was more typical for younger participants and more typical for females than

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