

# #Selfie or Virtual Mirror to New Narcissus

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## SUMMARY

*The selfie phenomenon can be viewed as a symptom and forewarning indication of a deeper globally spreading trend. The somewhat unforeseen development of the Internet toward one of most important phenomenon of the 21st century – social networking (like Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, Foursquare and other online communities) – raises some serious questions about its connection to the formation of individual personality. The article will present some psychological aspects and problems of virtual networking. A short review of positive sides to this phenomenon will be given, but the focus will be on critical approaches to potential and real risks and dangers for the personal psychological balance and integrity. It seems that individualistic self-reference and self-promotion, that are usually encouraged by the consumer, competitive and marketing culture of contemporary societies, are taking some new dimensions in the virtual world of hyper-exposure. Thus, the issue whether the Internet encourages, supports and enhances the already present self-centered, infantile-regressive and narcissistic tendencies and phenomena will be discussed. Does the available, fast and easy digital interaction without physical presence and validation, as well as the possibility of hiding or taking a false identity, affect the disinhibition from social and ethical constraints and rules, and reduce empathy and the sense of responsibility? Also, could digital literacy, if primarily understood as learning techniques and skills, become inversely proportional to*

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*emotional literacy? In order to prevent that, media literacy should be placed in a broader educational perspective, which encompasses psychology of media related to psychology of personality. That's why it is proposed to use the term "media education" instead of or at least along with "media literacy".*

Keywords: Media education, emotional literacy, media psychology, social networks, narcissism.

## **Introduction**

The fact that The Oxford Dictionary has elected "selfie" as the word of the year<sup>1</sup> is a significant and forewarning indication of a trend that emerged at the global level. Does the media hyper-exposure of celebrities, starlets and reality stars, now completed with "selfies" that invaded the network, oversaturates us to the point of desensitization? Or do we still feel a kind of discomfort, uneasiness regarding this phenomenon? The normalization and banalization of a phenomenon should not hide its lack of meaning, value and purpose, or even its harmfulness. Although we live in societies that declare themselves as modern, emancipated, secularized, yet we carry inside ourselves several millennia long experience of different, traditional cultures. In Europe, our collective subconsciousness (if not consciousness anymore), is still soaked in Christian values mixed with other traditional and local cultural features. With all the differences between them, the great traditional cultures (Jewish, Christian, Islamic, Buddhist, Hindu, Confucian, etc.) preached modesty, humility, temperance, (self)discipline, effort, contribution to society, orientation to serving the community, therefore, character, social, ethical and spiritual virtues. Vanity, self-promotion, self-praise, self-indulgence, especially indulgence in body and appearance, have been considered inappropriate, even sinful for a very long time. The focus on the looks and clothing were called shallowness, superficiality, frivolity or other negatively connoted names.

With the development of consumer, competitive individualism we are learning how to promote ourselves in order to sell as best as possible the attractive "package" of our abilities and skills on the labor, goods and services market. We get instructions on how to compile cover letters and resumes for a job, a scholarship, a position, how to dress, use non-verbal communication techniques etc. in order to make the best possible impression on others. In this kind of self-advertising, psychological and character traits such as diligence, conscientiousness, responsibility, reliability, professionalism, loyalty, cooperation, striving for improvement and the like, are still important. They represent qualities developed through continuous hard work,

learning, renunciation, education, postponement of gratification, and they are useful because they contribute to self-realization and advancement of society.

On the other hand, and simultaneously, self-promotion has been transferred to the level of appearance, the whole person being reduced to her/his body, or rather the sleek, photo-shopped, idealized view of the body, “processed” by regular fitness exercises, breast implants, surgical procedures and cosmetic interventions.

### **Research and empirical evidence on the selfie phenomenon**

According to a study by one of the largest plastic surgery associations, selfies are having a huge impact on the facial plastic surgery industry. Since the selfie trend developed, surgeons are having far more aesthetic interventions. One in three facial plastic surgeons said more people are asking for procedures due to more self-awareness of their looks on social media. The president of AAFPRS says applications such as Instagram and Snapchat are playing a huge role. They “force patients to hold a microscope up to their own image and often look at it with a more self-critical eye than ever before” Dr. Edward Farior said. (Walsh, 2014). Thirteen percent of AAFPRS members surveyed said increased photo sharing and patients’ dissatisfaction with their own photos on social media sites is leading to a rising trend in facial plastic surgeries. What is very alarming is that their patients, especially young people, want to undergo plastic surgery procedures to avoid bullying on the social networks because of their aesthetic “flaws” and “defects”. Most surgeons surveyed said 69 percent of children and teens are undergoing plastic surgery as a result of being bullied compared to 31 percent to prevent being bullied. (Walsh, 2014)

In this regard, there is an unusual relationship to one’s body in which the role of mediator between man and his body is held precisely by the computer and computer network. Thus for Bergson, our bodies are centers of action, produced through processes of selective perception, in which attention is manifest as action directed towards and by engagement with multiple “images” (Goodings and Tucker, 2014: 38). Social media present a challenge to the Bergsonian understanding of the body, as they provide the opportunity for us to present and produce our bodies in technologically mediated spaces in which they become images in a traditional sense as well as being technologically extended images known from within (Goodings and Tucker, 2014: 38-39).

The fashion imperative to photograph oneself and display these pictures for the attention of the crowd, involves the interdiction to have imperfect looks. The looks is moralized and many readers’ comments on social networks glorify a well maintained body, or condemn imperfect looks as a sign of negligence, sloppiness,

laziness, bad taste etc. The hedonism paradox lies in the fact that the treatment we impose on ourselves is more and more severe, which means that hedonism turns into masochism. Traditional virtues of effort, labor, self-discipline, have been shifted and perverted to serve the unique goal of maintaining and improving one's appearance.

The media have recently presented the case of a young British man who became dependent on selfies and spent at least ten hours a day striving to achieve the perfect selfie. In the article *Selfies Cause Narcissism, Mental Illness, Addiction and Suicide?* (Savastio, 2014), we can read the response of experts: "That's what seems to be suggested by expert opinion surrounding the phenomenon, and a man diagnosed with body dysmorphic disorder says he grew suicidal due to his addiction to taking selfies. Danny Bowman says he became so obsessed with trying to take the "right" selfie that he ended up shooting about 200 pictures a day while trying desperately to capture the perfect image of himself.

When Bowman failed to take what he perceived to be the perfect selfie, he attempted suicide by taking an overdose of drugs. Prior to his suicide attempt, he says, he would spend about ten hours every day taking selfies. Dr. David Veal, a physician involved in caring for Bowman, says selfies may cause mental illness, including body dysmorphic disorder, which has "an extremely high suicide rate." (Keating, 2014; Savastio, 2014).

The growing trend of taking smartphone selfies is linked to mental health conditions that focus on a person's obsession with looks. According to psychiatrist Dr David Veal: "Two out of three of all the patients who come to see me with Body Dysmorphic Disorder since the raise of camera phones have a compulsion to repeatedly take selfies". Public health officials in the UK announced that addiction to social media such as Facebook and Twitter is an illness and more than 100 patients sought treatment every year. "Selfies frequently trigger perceptions of self-indulgence or attention-seeking social dependence that raises the damned-if-you-do and damned-if-you-don't specter of either narcissism or low self-esteem" (Rutledge, 2014).

Many examples and studies warn us about the dangers of this new social phenomenon which is particularly developed among adolescents, and experts suggest possible consequences that are quite disturbing.<sup>2</sup> Networked media technologies such as smartphones and social network sites have become an integral part of young people's media repertoire worldwide. Not only does this fact go hand in hand with overwhelming changes of communicative practices but, more importantly, it also points to what Anthony Giddens referred to as 'transformation of intimacy' (Köhl

and Götzenbrucker, 2014: 509). He says that contemporary democratic societies focused on revolutionary processes induced by sexual emancipation, resulting in a 'wide-ranging emotional re-organization of social life' (Giddens, 1992: 182). In a *Daily News* article the author of "Rules of Netiquette" Julie Spira, says: "It is narcissistic, but it's becoming acceptable. The President's daughter posted a selfie from the inauguration, so why shouldn't you post from your high school or college graduation?" (Miller, 2013). Actually this comment shows very well that the epidemic of selfies is a kind of pastiche, the result of imitating the media hyper-exposure of celebrities (actors, music and sport stars, starlets, models). In fact, it supports MacLuhan's theory about the media-centric media and society relationship wherein media are "instigators of social change and the most important actors shaping social relations" (Miletić and Miletić, 2012: 179), which means that they have a huge influence on forming the values, attitudes, behavior and lifestyle of the recipient of media messages. Alfred Adler believes that one's style is nothing else than "what is called ego" (Adler, 1935: 5-8), and Gordon Allport adds that Adler's notion of lifestyle has a deep and important meaning (Allport, 2013: 46). However, when one's individual lifestyle is dominated by "tribal", opportunistic ways of adaptation, which are peripheral to the selfness, it indicates a stopped, underdeveloped personhood, i.e. a "mass individual" (Ortega y Gasset, 1994).

In the effort to avoid the anxiety caused by separation, and responsibility for one's existence that goes along with separation and singularity, conformity is, according to Fromm, the easiest way: "...the most common solution chosen by man of the past and present: a union based on conformity, the adaptation of a group, its customs, practices and beliefs." (Fromm, 1984: 18). Paradoxically, society that celebrates the individual is governed by "herd conformism" (Fromm, 1984: 19). How else to explain the viral phenomenon, which, as the adjective suggests, spreads globally like contagion?

Information technologies and their youngest "child" only provide more affordable opportunities and resources for the "ideal of non-individualized equality" (Fromm, 1984: 21), sameness and exchangeability of human entities - with minor and insignificant differences, as some kind of ersatz of individuality and original identity - to manifest in a completely stripped and unmasked form. The herd mentality of nowadays' atomized individuals reflects in mindless, automated imitation, in millions of selfies (with the subcategory of "after sex selfies"), couplies, groupies etc., that replicated the first ones. Conformity is the easiest way of avoiding the pain and responsibility of being oneself because it happens (apparently) without coercion, as one feels that it is his/her own wish and free decision.

## **Theoretical analysis and interpretation**

The previously cited Internet articles are useful as they identify the problem and warn of its consequences, albeit with some catastrophism and sensationalism, but they do not address the core of the problem. Referring to the mental health experts' opinion may obscure the issue, as it medicalizes a primarily social and cultural problem in accordance with the overall psychologization present in our contemporary individualistic-narcissistic culture, as was well noticed by Christopher Lasch (Lasch, 1991). Do experts' opinions discover anything about whether selfies are just a manifestation or one among other causal factors of narcissism? It is well known that correlation does not signify causation, and it often points to a more primary cause or combination of causes common to the involved correlates. It could well be that both phenomena (the trend of selfies and narcissism) arise from deeper and more ramified roots.

The elements of the beautiful Greek myth that are relevant for our subject (besides the power that physical beauty has over others, consequently over oneself), are Narcissus's indifference, insensitivity, pride, inability to empathize and eventually his insatiable passion for himself. The point is that it is not self-love, or love in general (if we want to distinguish love from feelings that only look like it), because Narcissus doesn't know this feeling either towards others or to himself. He doesn't know what it means to love himself because he falls in love passionately only when he sees his reflection in the inconsistent, elusive water. Craving to get closer to his reflection which disappears and dissolves as soon as he approaches too near, he loses himself, his original human nature and turns to a vegetative life form.

The difference between modern narcissism and what the myth of Narcissus tells us, is that the present narcissist primarily or solely doesn't enjoy watching himself in the mirror or in photographs but showing him/herself to others, enjoying their enjoyment in his image, according to the principle: "I am (or should be) what you would like me to be."

Narcissism is usually interpreted as one of the major symptoms of the uneasiness of the modern world and is described as a pathological effect of individualist logic carried to its extremes (Ehrenberg, 2010). However the question is whether narcissism indicates the crash or blind alley of individualism or just uncovers a structural defect lying in the core of this subject model.

Individualism, which was established as a political and social philosophy of emancipation of the individual, according to its critics, has grown into the ideology of unconstrained, atomized and self-centered individuals, therefore revealing its dark sides (Triest, 2004). Western societies are deeply marked by individualism, which

is the source of many impersonalisms affecting modern societies: impersonalism of the market freed from ethical obligations, technosciences impersonalism, bureaucracy impersonalism blind to human persons, race, ethnic, nation, fundamentalist impersonalisms etc. Individualism is not an obstacle to the massification of society. Instead, it favors it. "Where there is an individual, there is mass, for the individual is the fundamental instance of each massification" (Benasayag, 2004: 13). The endless repetition (Hegel's "bad infinity"), replication as multiplying the same that we see in the viral reproduction of selfies, confirms the individual's massification and automation of his/her behavior. Political and social philosophy of individualism puts a high value on individual freedom and generally emphasizes the limitness of the individual, self-oriented, self-absorbed and self-sufficient ego. At the very moment he/she might celebrate his/her triumph, the individual feels severely deluded. Freed from his/her chains and liabilities, at the same time he/ she is deprived of his/her clearly defined and recognized social roles, functions and identity. "Uprooted from the collective memory, emancipated from every culture, the individual wanders with his/her newfound freedom through the icy wilderness. It is no longer a desired, but tolerated individualism." (Benasayag, 2004: 13-14)

In this sense, narcissism allows us to question our contemporary culture imbued with ideals of independence, self-sufficiency, liberation of contents perceived as severe and inhibiting boundaries and constraints, in accordance with Fromm's concept of "freedom from". "In the course of individualization and fragmentation processes, western European societies have undergone a constant change in values in the post-war era (Joas, 2005 cit. in Köhl and Götzenbrucker, 2014). This has resulted in gravitation towards post-materialist values such as self-realization, a loosening of feeling rules and a broadening of concepts on potential personal relationships (Giddens, 1992 cit. in Köhl and Götzenbrucker, 2014). Due to the ongoing informalization of emotion (Gerhards, 1988 cit. in Köhl and Götzenbrucker, 2014), postmodern emotion cultures are characterized by great diversity, which also includes a change in moral principles" (Köhl and Götzenbrucker, 2014: 513) which in some way starts a cycle of dissatisfaction when in a few years, this "free" user of social media meets with photos of him/herself as many years younger. For example, to Facebook users it also presents a moment where the computer mediation is revealed, a process that requires managing the coming together of bodies from different 'space-times' (Goodings and Tucker, 2014: 41). Narcissism then reveals the vulnerability, fragility of the subject, as modern Narcissus does not refer to a strong individuality, but rather a not-yet-developed personality, a crumpled, weak self imbued with dangerous sense and phantasy of omnipotence and self-sufficiency on the background of fundamental helplessness. Today's man enters a frenetic search

for himself, and for his own individual happiness, and driven by anxiety which he is trying to calm by systematic recourse to all sorts of security, including the most available one: conformity and opportunism. That is where Christopher Lasch sees the triumph of Narcissus. In the area of sexuality, the emancipation of the individual from ancient taboos does not bring him/her peace: he/she seeks immediate gratification and lives in a state of anxious and eternally insatiable desires. (Lasch, 1991). Having demonstrated the evolution of literature, educational system, mass media and political discourse, Lasch draws the “geography” of modern narcissism in which he sees the final stage of the twilight of civilization. “I” or “me” - as the equivalent of existing in a continuous present moment, without being inscribed in historical continuity and a wider, higher order - invaded society. Lasch notices this invasion in the trend of psychology or psychologizing, sexual obsessions spread out to the public attention and in public discourses, feverishness of individual self-experiments, spectacularization of existence, loss of interest in work, egotism of the nuclear, essentially consumer family, mimetism relating to the show business stars who represent “the most striking emblem of contemporary media culture” today. (Vukadinović, 2013: 11).

As the traditional mass media play a significant role in the creation of reality, so the appearance of another phenomenon preceded the selfie and its global distribution. We speak about the creation of so-called “celebrities”, i.e. models imitated by many today’s selfies (pouting lips, selection of more photogenic semi-profile, choice of clothes, hairstyle, etc.). For most of the twentieth century, many critics and theorists of culture and cultural studies, including the representatives of the Frankfurt School, interpreted the emergence of the term “celebrity” as the product of consumerism, mass culture and cultural industries (Jacobs and Hanrahan, 2008:178). For them, it was a way of manipulating the masses and was related to directing the attention of public towards unrealistic, false representations of the opportunities offered by that society.<sup>3</sup> Also, according to these theorists, celebrities offered a fake system where the reality was identified with movies. This implied a *conditio sine qua non* of celebrity: they had to be people with public professional and personal biography which more or less encompassed participants in public affairs and activities from politicians through artists who belonged to the so-called elite art, to pop artists. However, along with the development of technology over time, the phenomenon of fame and celebrity evolved as “part of a broader social process that is associated with the cultural, economic, political and technological developments” (Vukadinović, 2013: 22). At the beginning of the new century and with the Internet expansion, it transferred from the previous public sphere<sup>4</sup> to a general, i.e. global level. Thus, with the advent of the Internet, and especially smartphones and other



devices by means of which global network is accessible at any time, at one point virtually every anonymous person can reach Warhol's famous 15 minutes of fame – which in all possible ways he/she wishes to extend indefinitely.

“In the complex process of converting an anonymous person into a celebrity, a representation of someone which is formed is, in fact, only a skillfully created illusion.” (Vukadinović, 2013: 29). The virtual image from an imaginary world of the life that famous supposedly live is sent through certain media formats, and its simulation in the process of transmission and reception is experiencing its verification and embodiment, so that this “virtual world doesn't sit ‘out there’, but invades the ‘real’ world” (Koltay, 2011: 211), and then, through social networks returns again into virtuality creating new behavior models.

Some features of the Internet, as a new media for mass communication and other forms of communication<sup>5</sup>, represent advantages in the sense of fastness and accessibility. Social networks and other communication platforms in the virtual world are reaching the pinnacle of their expediency most notably in this area, as they enable rapprochement that is physically impossible. State borders and geographic distances are annulled so that various platforms enable synchronous and/or asynchronous but daily communication between friends, relatives and business partners regardless of how far away from each other they are in the real world. Also, we must not forget that the advent of the so-called blogosphere and independent news portals that can quite simply be “parked” on their domains enabled public access, and so, unlike traditional media the Internet virtually represents the only area in which the individual can freely and publicly express him/herself. However, since we are in a paradoxical situation in which the technology has evolved faster than man there is more abuse than use. On the other hand, Internet is not the first man's artifact that has been wrongly used.

Returning back to the source behavior model, we should keep in mind Boorstin's critics of fame. His theories lead to the conclusion that the emergence of each new mass media (press, film, radio, television and at the end the Internet) along with a communication revolution brought about other changes as, for example, a different relationship to famous people. Boorstin believes that the graphic revolution that happened with the emergence of television caused the production of new heroes who served to “fill time gaps” between the news. He writes: “Then came round-the-clock media. The news gap soon became so narrow that in order to have additional ‘news’ for each edition or each broadcast it was necessary to plan in advance the stages by which any available news would be unveiled. After the weekly and the daily came the ‘extras’ and the numerous regular editi-

ons” (Boorstin, 2012: 23). Boorstin also states that “the root of our problem, the social source of these exaggerated expectations, is in our novel power to make men famous. Of course, there never was a time when ‘fame’ was precisely the same thing as ‘greatness’. But, until very recently, famous men and great men were nearly the same group [...] A man’s name was not apt to become a household word unless he exemplified greatness in some way or other. He might be a Napoleon, great in power, a J. P. Morgan, great in wealth, a St. Francis, great in virtue, or a Bluebeard, great in evil. To become publicly known a man usually had to be something of a hero: as a dictionary tells us, a man ‘admired for his courage, nobility, or exploits’” (Boorstin, 2012: 48). According to this theory, it can be concluded that the graphic revolution doesn’t stop, that it goes on, because from the level of a person with the mentioned public professional biography, the fame has been transferred (or lowered?) even on completely unknown individuals. In a sort of tautological circle, the only criterion of being publicly known is being publicly, i.e. media exposed. From the period of books and press in which, at the time when they were the only mass media, heroism and therefore fame was measured by other norms, until the time when the world is ruled by Web 2.0 the value system has significantly changed. In less than a century, what initially served to fill the gaps became the primary topics. One can not avoid noticing that all mass media were involved in this process, so that in this respect it may be said that selfies are only the final consequence of (bad) work or (bad) conceptions of traditional media.

### **The need for media education**

In such a system, where there is a high rate of media consumption and society that is saturated by media (Koltay, 2011: 211) media literacy and media education are more than necessary. For Miletić and Miletić this type of education involves “a set of individual development aptitudes for critical reception and evaluation of media contents, skills in use and management of the media and their creative use in the work process and everyday life” (Miletić and Miletić, 2012: 191), which means that this kind of knowledge, know-how and skills improvement is needed by all. Introducing media literacy in formal education would bring the necessary precondition for further common evolution of man and technology, in the intellectual sense. Also, by strengthening and sharpening the audience’s selective, critical and other cognitive capacities needed in consuming all forms of mass media communication, this kind of education would contribute to elevate the quality of media contents at all levels - including those within the online community in which everyone who

wants it can be publicly visible. A social network user, especially the one who has an allowed so-called open access (Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, etc.) is, said in journalist vocabulary, the editor in chief of his/her own profile. With the growth of the number of his/her followers, his/her influence on others and so his/her responsibility for the content that he/she creates and places in the media i.e. Internet also grows. Thus, the “success” of new celebrities entails greater responsibility towards the public that observe them. The part of the Internet which includes social networking possibilities of viral information spreading gets the status of mass media communication. Therefore it is extremely important for the creators of media contents that are distributed in this way to be media educated. One of the main goals of education, therefore media education too, is strengthening and raising the sense of responsibility. This sense should be even more developed as we all know that whatever is placed on the network remains there permanently and indelibly. Bearing this always in mind we could avoid many feelings of shame, guilt and humiliation at some point later. As for the selfies, it should be noted that any publicly spoken word has its weight and (potentially permanent) consequences and that a picture tells more than thousand words.

Not so long ago (only half of the century) in his book *Understanding the Media* the famous media theorist Marshall McLuhan said about photography: “Nobody can commit photography alone. It is possible to have at least the illusion of reading and writing in isolation, but photography does not foster such attitudes” (McLuhan, 1964: 189). In this case it seems that the otherwise great visionary did not make a good prognosis, since the emergence of selfies denied his claim. He also describes “photography as a kind of automation that eliminated the syntactical procedures of pen and pencil [...] For photography mirrored the external world automatically, yielding an exactly repeatable visual image” (McLuhan, 1964: 190), but with the advent of computer, this also is not necessarily true. The famous Adobe’s Photoshop and other similar softwares have allowed that images may not be entirely reflections of reality. With the advent of smartphones and mobile social networks like Instagram, there is the possibility of taking photos through the platform and a whole range of different so-called filters that enable embellishing and magnifying reality. In addition, the powerful tool provides the user with the feeling that he/she is creating a work of art (sepia, b&w photo, LoMo etc.).

However, this and other “McLuhan’s ideas are of essential importance for the psychology of media” (Giles, 2011: 15) as well as their further interpretation in the direction of media education. As Toffler spoke of “informational overflow”, we daily face plenty of verbal and visual material, that may eventually lead to a state of complete disorientation (Toffler, 1970: 350-354). David Giles says that

“in order to be able to distinguish reliable or useful information from spam, marketing and pure lies we need to possess a certain level of media literacy which is not always within our capacities”. The outcome could be a state of ‘media blindness’ when we are unable to identify the source of information that we received and when we confuse our actual experience with the mediated one.” (Giles, 2011: 19). Therefore, understanding the psychology of the media should be a necessary part of overall media education. Regarding this component, it is necessary to understand the media not (only) as technological instruments, but in the way McLuhan addressed them: as media messages. (McLuhan, 1964: 7-21). This theory requires that every new media that appears in modern society should be treated as a completely new cultural phenomenon (Giles, 2011: 16). We can go a step further by saying that the omnipresent media are not just one among other cultural phenomena, but a totalizing system that mediates all other phenomena, and also creates many others. Giles goes on speaking of the need to penetrate the psychology of the media so that the public could become aware of the ways in which the media infiltrate into everyday life, and of the fact that they actually are part of everyday life to the extent that man is no longer able to recognize (Giles, 2011: 19-20) without being media educated.

“Raising awareness has multiple benefits for the whole of society. James Potter (2008: 56) states that benefits are many, but he particularly points out the desire for a diversity of media messages, greater self-programming of mental codes and most importantly - in full compliance with the duties of the recipients of media messages that have already been discussed - a greater control over the media. Porter further argues that the mass media are companies that have a high level of ability to attract the public attention and influence the continued use of their products. What media literacy can do in this regard is to enable the recognition of the moment when the objectives of public and media do not match and so persuasive or manipulative techniques occur” (Ercegovac, 2014: 450-451). In this regard, making selfies as a result of copying celebrities supports the Frankfurt School theorists and others who have talked about manipulation systems consisting of displacing main topics of public interest out of the focus of the majority of population. In this context too Volkov suggests the need to “build one’s own opinion, instead of buying it ready made.” (Volkov, 2002: 236)

“Judging by the time we spend with our media, we love them” (Potter, 2011: 25). According to researches conducted in the world the time spent with the media increases from year to year. Researches conducted in the United States since 2005 show that Americans spend 70% of waking hours with media. In contrast to the time spent with media, the time dedicated to work is only 21%. (Ransford, 2013).

At the global level, these figures are not different, so the conclusion is that the average person spends about 11 hours with one or another type of media.<sup>6</sup> In addition, these studies show that the time spent with online media (computer, mobile phone, tablet) increases and that in the past year time spent online was more dominant compared to the time spent with traditional media, and Internet users spend the most of their online time on social networks.<sup>7</sup> The uptrend is in commenting on forums, blogs and news portals.

The previous theoretical considerations and available empirical evidence strongly speak in favor of media education, as digital phenomena such as selfies, show that there is a high prevalence of automatic normative behavior, i.e. unreflective conformist acceptance of media content and trends. We remind that unreflective conformism is the thoughtless repetition of common ideas and practices, not only without criticism, but without questioning or understanding their relations and purposes. It is roughly what Heidegger calls “inauthenticity“, doing what “one” does. In the case of selfies, this massive trend highlights the strong correlation between inauthenticity (false self) and narcissism (Green, 2005: 133)

As access to Internet through any device involves the increase of interactivity, the need for media education becomes greater because it is not only necessary for the identification and classification of the received contents, that Giles spoke about, but also for its high quality creation and placement. In such a context the need for a stronger sense of responsibility, that has already been mentioned, is obviously necessary too.

Another and maybe the most important danger that lurks the users who superficially and unselectively approach such a powerful media as the Internet, is indifference due to stimulus overload, i.e. oversaturation and desensitization. Indifference to others is a trait of narcissism as self-centeredness. If we add to the previously mentioned causes of narcissism the always available, quick and easy digital interaction, deprived of physical presence, i.e. of nonverbal signs and mutual verifications and corrections of perceptions and behaviors, the possibility of hiding one’s identity or taking over a false one, we see that many factors entail disinhibition from social and ethical constraints and norms, as well as a reduction of empathy and sense of responsibility. Communication is broken into instantaneous fragments, isolated from its whole context of meaning and from consequences that serve as correctives to our actions. The anonymity and invisibility make easy offensive behaviors (Erjavec and Poler Kovačić, 2013). All of this facilitates the manifestation of antisocial behaviors, such as the increase in violence on the networks, known as cyberbullying (Bilić, 2014).

## Conclusion

The myth says that Narcissus was insensitive, he did not have pity or mercy for those who struggled for a bit of his attention and affection. Are beauty, self-absorption, inability to love, empathize and the final downfall connected in the myth accidentally? Or is it, as it is the case with many great myths whose value is eternal, a psychologically deep, intuitive, archetypal insight? If we translated this insight in today's context where we have legions of narcissists, we would say that the obsession with one's and others' looks swallows attention, time and energy (which are limited resources) needed for a *real* consciousness of *real* other people, *real* and *significant* issues and problems of existence.

The mythical Narcissus did not ask for attention and adoration, it even irritated and annoyed him. He did not call others to join him in observing his reflection. His downfall is proportional to the measure of his isolation in the uniqueness of his individual, self-sufficient being. After all, he is a timeless, eternal mythical figure. Today's small narcissists - who make so great a multitude that narcissism has been accepted and normalized (Lasch, 1991) seek, ask, beg for attention, adoration and followers. They are not dependent on others as persons, but as evaluators. And not even from those, but from the way the many headed hydra (undefined, formless, boundless, impersonal mass) looks at them and judges them, namely their appearance.

The narcissistic personality is characterized by a grandiose sense of self-importance going with a proportional lack of sense for the importance of other people, their feelings and needs. The narcissists require continuous, infallible and excessive admiration and adoration. They believe they are special, unique, exceptional, above all others, which is inevitably followed by arrogance, manipulative and exploitative attitudes and lack of understanding and empathy for others (Orlandić, 2011). The narcissistic individual considers him/herself to be the center of the world, but doesn't acknowledge the same to others. Narcissism correlates with histrionic personality disorder (HPD) which is characterized by a pattern of excessive emotions and attention-seeking, including inappropriately provocative and seductive behavior and an excessive need for approval (Piotrowski and Irons-Georges, 2003: 739). Some additional characteristics are exhibitionist or overly dramatic, theatrical and expansive behavior. Such people care about their looks, and invest a lot in their body and overall physical impression they create on others. As they are focused on the impression they make, i.e. as they have a high external locus of control, they are being easily influenced by others, especially those who treat them approvingly, which means that they are also excessively sensitive to criticism or disapproval (Bienenfeld, 2006).

From previously said it would be illegitimate to conclude the reverse, i.e. that caring about one's appearance and physical impression indicates narcissism with all characteristics involved in this disorder. Therefore it would also be illegitimate to claim that authors of selfies are *necessarily* narcissistic (that is to say, arrogant, manipulative, envious with a distorted perception of self and others, non empathetic etc.). But it can be noticed that the selfie trend in itself and in its close relation to the hyper mediatization of celebrities and celestoids<sup>8</sup> (Rojek, 2004), belongs to a broader and more comprehensive narcissistic pattern that functions as a *Weltanschauung*, value orientation and lifestyle (which is greatly conditioned and constructed by the media) in our contemporary market and consumer society and culture.

Besides the fact that many authors of selfies long to be visible, commented, approved and admired, as well as to do the same to other selfie makers, another very important issue is the purpose of such activities. So, in addition to the fact that the need to see and be seen, to copy celebrities and imitate their glamorous looks and lifestyle is very much induced, fabricated, inflated and overrated, it's also a meaningless striving. Taking "photos of oneself" out of any pertinent and meaningful context or purpose, without creating any relevant or useful, literal or symbolic message, in its sheer self-reference emptied of any other content and intentionality - has no significance at all.

It can be said that only online community members are aware of this emptiness, because it can occasionally be noticed that besides #selfie, Instagram users use, though less frequently, another #gpom: Gratuitous Picture Of Myself. It is important to call attention to the ambiguity of the term "gratuitous": on one side it means free, donated, and on the other, unnecessary, unjustified, which implies the question: why, what for, for what purpose? Doesn't the fashion of taking and posting selfies push us down into a still deeper existential "fall" (in the existentialistic sense of the word), i.e. into banality, defined as lack of depth, stereotyped, inauthentic, thoughtless and mindless state and behavior? "Banality is the process and outcome of reducing complexity to homogeneity, multilayered phenomena to single layered, deep to superficial, unique and different to uniform, and creative to routinized" (Milivojević and Miljanović: 2012: 449). Isn't it where a narcissistic and conformist culture, where people paradoxically tend to emphasize their individuality and differences by imitating others, eventually will take us? Millions of different but so alike selfies in endless series of "bad infinity" (Hegel) remind and warn us that if we didn't pay attention we could make true the definition of ourselves - our very personhood - as pure "meme machines" (Blackmore, 2000). Bearing this in mind, we believe that media education is (like classical education, but now involving new sociocultural phenomena and tools) necessarily and comprehensively mind, character and moral education.

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> 'Selfie' named by Oxford Dictionaries as word of 2013, <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-24992393>
- <sup>2</sup> Articles on this subject can be found on: [http://www.medicinenet.com/body\\_dysmorphic\\_disorder/article.htm](http://www.medicinenet.com/body_dysmorphic_disorder/article.htm), <http://dailylounge.com/the-daily/entry/science-confirms-that-selfies-are-the-worst>, <http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/positively-media/201304/selfies-narcissism-or-self-exploration>, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/03/25/selfie-addiction-mental-illness\\_n\\_5022090.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/03/25/selfie-addiction-mental-illness_n_5022090.html)
- <sup>3</sup> Max Horkheimer and Teodor Adorno spoke about this problem especially in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, (2002) .
- <sup>4</sup> According to Habermas, at the time of electronic and print mass media the public is only the part of society that has access to these media..All other social groups are actually outside of the public sphere. See more about this topic in Habermas, J. (1991).
- <sup>5</sup> Interpersonal communication and communication with larger social groups, ie. publics.
- <sup>6</sup> <http://blog.globalwebindex.net/online-time-now-exceeds-offline-media-consumption-globally/>
- <sup>7</sup> IPSOS MediaCT (2012) „Praćenje korišćenja novih medija – 2012“ (Monitoring the use of new media – 2012) [http://www.mc.rs/upload/documents/saopštenja\\_izvestaji/2012/120712\\_IPSOS-korisjenje-novih-medija.pdf](http://www.mc.rs/upload/documents/saopštenja_izvestaji/2012/120712_IPSOS-korisjenje-novih-medija.pdf)
- <sup>8</sup> From „celebrity + oid“, meaning a person who is famous for a brief time; a short-lived celebrity, mostly without any talent or achievement, such as reality show stars.

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# #Selfie ili virtualno zrcalo novog Narcisa

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## SAŽETAK

Fenomen selfija (*selfie*) se može promatrati kao simptom i opominjući pokazatelj jednog dubljeg trenda koji se širi na globalnoj razini. Donekle nepredviđeni razvoj interneta u pravcu jednog od najznačajnijih *online* fenomena 21. stoljeća – društveno mrežnog povezivanja (*Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Pinterest, Foursquare* i mnoge druge *online* zajednice) – nameće ozbiljna pitanja o njegovoj povezanosti s načinom na koji se formira ličnost. U članku će se raspravljati o nekim psihološkim aspektima i problemima virtualne umreženosti. Bit će predstavljen kratak osvrt na pozitivne strane tog fenomena, ali će fokus biti na kritičkom pristupu potencijalnim i stvarnim rizicima i opasnostima po psihološku ravnotežu i integritet osobe. Individualistička samoreferentnost i samopromoviranje, koji se i inače snažno potiču u potrošačkoj, konkurentskoj i marketinškoj kulturi, u hiperekspoziranosti virtualnog svijeta čini se, poprimaju nove dimenzije. U tom smislu će se ispitati da li internet potiče, potkrepljuje i povećava već prisutne egocentrične, infantilno-regresivne i narcističke tendencije i pojave. Da li dostupna, brza i laka digitalna interakcija, bez fizičkog prisustva i provjere s mogućnošću skrivanja ili preuzimanja lažnog identiteta, utječe na dezinhbiranje socijalnih i etičkih ograničenja i normi, na smanjenje empatije i osjećaja za odgovornost? Zatim, da li digitalna pismenost, ako je shvaćena prije svega kao ovladavanje tehnikom i vještinom, može postati obrnuto proporcionalna emocionalnoj pismenosti? Da bi se to spriječilo medijsku pismenost treba postaviti u širu obrazovnu perspektivu, koja bi obuhvaćala i psihologiju medija, odnosno psihologiju ličnosti korisnika. Zato se predlaže da se izraz „medijsko obrazovanje“ koristi umjesto ili barem uz „medijska pismenost“.

Ključne reči: medijsko obrazovanje, emocionalna pismenost, psihologija medija, društvene mreže, narcizam.