

## **Quit Facebook | by Carmen Joy King via Adbusters**

In March, at the peak of Facebook popularity, I quit. With four swift clicks of the mouse, I canceled my account. Gone was the entire online persona I had created for myself – profile pictures, interests and activities, work history, friends acquired – all carefully thought out to showcase to the world the very best version of me, all now deleted.

Ironically, the decision to destroy my carefully built-up virtual image came as a result of wanting to enhance my profile. All that particular week I'd been hungry for new quotes on my page, something to reflect the week I'd been having: something introspective. I perused a quotes website and found this one attributed to Aristotle:

"We are what we repeatedly do."

I became despondent. What, then, was I? If my time was spent changing my profile picture on Facebook, thinking of a clever status update for Facebook, checking my profile again to see if anyone had commented on my page, Is this what I am? A person who re-visits her own thoughts and images for hours each day? And so what do I amount to? An egotist? A voyeur?

Whatever the label, I was unhappy and feeling empty. The amount of time I spent on Facebook had pushed me into an existential crisis. It wasn't the time-wasting, per se, that bothered me. It was the nature of the obsession – namely self-obsession. Enough was enough. I left Facebook.

In the past, my feelings toward Facebook and similar social networking sites had swung between a genuine sense of connection and community to the uncomfortable awareness that what all of our blogs, online journals and personal profiles really amounted to was serious narcissism. As my feelings of over-exposure continued to mount, the obvious solution would have been to set limits on my Facebook time – yet I still found myself sucked in for longer periods every time I visited. In part, it was the hundreds of little links to and hints about other people's lives that kept me coming back. But even more addicting were the never-ending possibilities to introduce, enhance and reveal more of myself.

The baby-boomers were at one time thought to be the most self-absorbed generation in American history and carried the label of the Me Generation. In recent years this title has been appropriated, twisted and reassigned to the babies of those same boomers – born in the 80s and 90s – now called Generation Me or the Look at Me Generation. Author Jean Twenge, an Associate Professor of Psychology at San Diego State University and herself a member of Generation Me – spent ten years doing research on this group's sense of entitlement and self-absorption. She attributed it to the radical individualism that was engendered by baby-boomer parents and educators focused on instilling self-esteem in children beginning in the 1970s. American and Canadian youth were raised on aphorisms such as "express yourself" and "just be yourself."

To further illustrate her point, Twenge also found a large increase in self-reference words like "I," "me," "mine" and "myself" in news stories published in the 80s and 90s. These words replaced collective words such as "we," "us," "humanity," "country" or "crowd" found in the stories of a similar nature in the 50s and 60s. This generation might be the least thoughtful, community-oriented and conscientious one in North American history.

In the end, what does all this online, arms-length self-promotion ultimately provide? Perhaps it's merely one component of the pursuit to alleviate some of the blackness encountered in the existential vacuum of modern life. As Schopenhauer once projected, modern humans may be doomed to eternally vacillate between distress and boredom. For the vast majority of people experiencing the fragmented, fast-paced modern world of 2008, a Sunday pause at the end of a hectic week may cause them to become all too aware of the lack of content in their lives. So we update our online profiles and tell ourselves that we are reaching out.

And yet, the time we waste on Facebook only makes our search for comfort and community more elusive. Online networking sites are marketed as facilitators of community-orientation but when I think about the millions of people – myself included – who spend large portions of their waking lives feeding off an exchange of thousands of computerized, fragmented images, it doesn't add up to community-engagement. These images have no meaning beyond "I look pretty from this angle" or "I'm wasted" or "look who my new boyfriend is." And as we continue to chase even harder – accessing Facebook at work, uploading images from our cell phones – we spend our money on constantly upgraded electronic gadgets marketed to our tendency to self-obsess and present particularly uninteresting and repetitive images of ourselves. There's got to be more than this.

And so I quit...

After I left Facebook, I wondered what all my friends, family and acquaintances were going to think when they noticed I'd disappeared off the Facebook earth. So some of my Facebook narcissism – am I being noticed, am I being missed – remains. But I'm also asking myself some new questions. How do I find balance between my online life and my "real" life? How much exposure is healthy? How do I act responsibly for myself and engage with those I love? These are still "me" thoughts but they feel different than before. As I sit here, keyboard under palm, eyes on screen, I try to remind myself that my hands and eyes need to venture out into the community and look and touch the truly tangible that lies just beyond that other big screen: my window.

- Carmen Joy King

1. What inspired Carmen Joy King to cancel her Facebook account?
2. What type of person was she afraid of becoming?
3. What does she say social networking really amounts to?
4. What is narcissism?
5. What did she find addicting about Facebook?
6. What does Jean Twenge say is the cause of our generation's self-absorption? Do you agree that our generation is self-absorbed? Do you agree that this is the cause?
7. What purpose does Facebook serve in our lives, according to King?
8. How does social networking encourage us to spend recklessly?
9. What are some of the drawbacks that King experiences after quitting Facebook?
10. What are some of the benefits she experiences after quitting Facebook?