



WASTE REPORT for October 25, 2016

A Selfie of Waste

Selfies, pictures of food, a beautiful sunset ... we see them all over social media. While these pictures might make us smile, does taking them actually make us happier? That is a question you paid a group of researchers at the University of California, Irvine to answer.

The study, released earlier this year, found that taking pictures with your smartphone can actually make you happier and, in some instances, more calm.¹ **What probably will make you less happy and calm is that this study was partially funded by a \$500k National Science Foundation grant - your tax dollars.**²

Instead of using existing technology, the researchers developed two smartphone apps (one overlaid the other) for participants to take photos and record their moods. **This resulted in 17.5 percent of participants dropping out of the study in the first week due to “system incompatibility issues.”**³ **That probably made no one happy.**

Nonetheless, could it be that pulling out your phone and snapping pictures is the secret to happiness? Well, not so fast. **You cannot just take any picture - it seems the key to happy snapping (at least based on this study) is taking pictures of happy things. Who knew?**

The study broke participants up into three groups who, for three weeks, took pictures of themselves smiling, things that made them happy, or, for the third group, things they thought would make someone else happy (which they then sent to that person). Not surprisingly, taking happiness-focused pictures showed a positive effect on all three groups' moods.⁴

One might not expect that if you told someone to drive to a place that makes them happy every day for three weeks, and that person showed an improvement in their mood, you could conclude driving makes people happy. **So, what happens when happiness is not in the frame (pun intended)? We do not know. In fact, the study did not include a control group of participants taking random pictures or even selfies where they did not intentionally smile.**

Regardless of this flaw in the research, one has to wonder if selfie studies are really the kind of research your tax dollars should be spent on.

So, if this has made you less happy, sit back, smile, and take a selfie...it might help...but probably not.

¹ <https://psywb.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/s13612-016-0044-4>

² NSF grant number 1218705

<https://federalreporter.nih.gov/Projects/Details/?projectId=70709&itemNum=1&totalItems=1&searchId=44123b30464140efa43acfb6d69727de&searchMode=Advanced&page=1&pageSize=100&sortField=&sortOrder=&filters=#description>

³ <https://psywb.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/s13612-016-0044-4>

⁴ Ibid