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What It Means When Couples Constantly Post About Each Other On Social Media

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We all know *that* couple on social media: They barrage us with #tbts of their last vacation and over-fawning anniversary posts, and they love reminding followers that they're #couplegoals personified.

Interestingly enough, some research suggests that the opposite may be true: Our online posting habits are directly tied to what social scientists call “relationship visibility” — the extent to which we make our relationships part of our public personas. Having very high “relationship visibility” and over-posting about a partner may be a mask for relationship insecurity, according to a study recently published in the *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*.

The researchers hypothesized that attachment styles — how we emotionally bond and attach to others in our adult lives — underlie relationship visibility and our desire to post. (Read more about attachment theory and the types of attachment styles here.)

The researchers posited that people with avoidant attachment styles, who tend to withdraw from their partners, would show low desire for relationship visibility, and those with anxious attachment styles, who need more reassurance about their relationship, would report a high desire for visibility. (There's a third attachment style — secure attachment — but the researchers were unable to find an association between that type and posting habits.) After recruiting 108 college couples to keep a daily diary about their relationship for two weeks, the researchers' findings supported the hypothesis.

“On a daily basis, when people felt more insecure about their partner's feelings, they tended to make their relationships visible,” the researchers wrote. “These studies highlight the role of relationships in how people portray themselves to others.”

Jennifer Chappell Marsh, a marriage and family therapist in San Diego, California, who's unaffiliated with the study, told us she often sees this dynamic play out in her office.

“Avoidant attached people tend to disengage and withdraw from their partners while anxiously attached people are almost always seeking reassurance about their relationship, even on social media,” Chappell Marsh said.

“Oftentimes, they're looking for positive attention in the absence of getting the reassurance from their partner.” Jennifer Chappell Marsh, marriage and family therapist in San Diego
Chappell Marsh used the example of a dinner date to illustrate the difference: An avoidant partner may be content with a quiet, intimate dinner, but their anxiously attached partner may be too busy Snapchatting everything to enjoy it. The impulse to document may be even stronger if the avoidant partner is standoffish throughout the night.

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“That disconnect triggers a spike in relationship anxiety for the anxious type,” Chappell Marsh said. “As a result, the insecure partner may take a relationship pic and post it on Facebook to get ‘likes.’ Oftentimes, they’re looking for positive attention in the absence of getting the reassurance from their partner.”

The partner who isn’t posting may end up complaining, though not necessarily because they’re annoyed with the oversharing aspect. More often than not, the person is bothered that their partner prioritizes posting over quality couple time, said Zach Brittle, a therapist and founder of the online couples therapy series forBetter.

“The narrative about social media I hear the most in my office are complaints about one or both partners becoming addicted to their phones,” Brittle said. “Social media is an opportunity for people to turn away from the relationship and toward some other stimulus. It makes sense why people do it; there’s plenty of data about the dopamine hit that comes from getting ‘likes’ or reshares.”

Whatever the person’s reason for overposting — the thrill of the “likes” or some core insecurity about the relationship — if you’re an outsider who’s annoyed by the posts, remember that people tend to only post the highlights of their lives, not the low points. And ultimately, there’s no one definitive reason why some people share so many braggy posts.

“The oversharer may be genuinely happy and want to express that via social media — or they might feel they have something to prove to their peers or want to take the focus off other areas of their lives they feel insecure about,” said Danielle Kepler, owner of DK Therapy, a group practice in Chicago specializing in couples.

In the end, no relationship is as perfect as it’s portrayed on Instagram.

“At this point, it’s a societal norm to smile in pictures, even if you just had an argument five minutes before the photo was snapped,” Kepler said.

And while those on the outside may equate oversharing with trying too hard, Brittle cautioned against jumping to conclusions about the couple.

“If they’re trying too hard to project a certain image, they’re probably protecting something — some image or some ideal,” Brittle said. “Why? As a therapist, I think it’s important to *ask* that question but not necessarily have to answer it. Ultimately, each couple’s individual story is unique. Social media allows them to craft a version of that story, even if it’s not realistic.”

Answer the following questions:

Explain how this research indicates a negative correlation.

What form of attachment do relationship posters usually fall under? Explain why.

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How might this research be flawed? What might be needed to make the results more reliable?