

Selfies, Surgeries And Self-Loathing: Inside The Facetune Epidemic

The massively popular photo-editing app Facetune is driving a generation of young women to extreme and obsessive lengths to look flawless online.

By Jesselyn Cook | 05/20/2021 05:00 am ET | Updated Jun 04, 2021

Sky Lane scrolled through the pictures from an impromptu photo shoot she'd done with her friend and picked her favorite. It was cute — she was showing off her side profile in a black crop top, tight blue jeans, big silver hoops and smoky bronze eyeshadow. But the 21-year-old wouldn't dare post it to Instagram for the world to see just yet. She opened Facetune, a photo-retouching app on her iPhone, and got to work.

Using the "Reshape" tool, she started pushing her tummy inward, little by little. She had to be careful not to noticeably warp the background in the process; the trick was to edit the photo without making it *look* like it had been edited. Skewed lines, blurry edges and inconsistencies in shadows and reflections were easy giveaways that Lane had learned how to avoid through years of practice — she'd been Facetuning since she was a teenager. She used the same tool to give herself a breast lift, slim her arm, cinch her waist and make her butt rounder, like the bodies flooding her Instagram feed.

Next she moved onto her face. Her friend had taken the photo using a Snapchat filter that had already plumped her lips, slimmed her nose and smoothed her skin so much her pores were no longer visible, but Lane applied Facetune's complexion retouching effect for good measure. Her jawline was an easy fix with the jaw-slimming tool. Usually she'd whiten her teeth, but they were hardly showing. The more technical tweaks, like individually repositioning her eyebrows and narrowing the tip of her nose, required tools only available on the paid version of the app, which she'd upgraded to long ago.

She was done in under 20 minutes. The final product still looked like her, Lane decided, just a better, more acceptable version. She sent it to her mom, who didn't seem to notice that anything had been altered, giving Lane the reassurance she needed that it was pretty *and* believable — polished but not overdone. She wouldn't want her followers to accuse her of being a "catfish," a term that has evolved in the Facetune era to describe someone who enhances their pictures beyond recognition.

Lane was finally ready to post the photo. It got 179 "likes," which she thought was pretty good; without Facetune, she figured, she'd be lucky to get 40. Like the myriad other women who've been conditioned to pick apart their appearances, Lane has countless insecurities — including many that are invisible to everyone except her. The app makes them go away with a few simple finger strokes and ushers in the social validation she craves, which is at once addictively thrilling and utterly depressing.

Facetune makes it harder for her to love herself, but at least she can love her selfie.

Photo-retouching technology has existed for decades, and concern about its toll on the self-esteem of women, and girls in particular, is nothing new. But with the meteoric rise of Facetune and a suite of similar apps that put ever-advancing versions of these tools into the pocket of anyone with a smartphone, digitally perfected faces and bodies are no longer restricted to magazine covers or pictures posted by celebrities who can afford cosmetic surgeries and professional photo editors. They're *everywhere* in our social media world: all over the profiles of influencers and, quite possibly, your own friends. As a result, the pressure facing today's young women to look flawless can feel inescapable.

"Pretty much every single influencer uses Facetune, except for the handful of body-positive ones who go out of their way to talk about why it can be toxic," said Dana Omari, 31, the [med-spa](#) and social media consultant from Houston behind [@igfamousbydana](#).

"To the untrained eye, it can be hard to tell [when someone has used Facetune], but just little tweaks here and there can give them a totally different appearance," she added. "Anyone can change their entire body or face in a couple minutes."

The pressure to do so is, for many, part of the Instagram experience.

The platform, which saw a [more than 40% spike](#) in usage among young users early in the pandemic, is a cultural ground zero for new and emerging beauty trends: hence the terms "Instagram model" and "Instagrammable," meaning aesthetically pleasing enough to post. But it isn't just hosting an endless sea of images showcasing unrealistic beauty standards — it's actively driving users with body image issues toward them.

Instagram's Explore feed is algorithmically curated to show users more of what they already look at, whether it's puppies, vegan meal plans or picture-perfect influencers. The result is an echo chamber in which self-conscious young women are bombarded with photos of their desired faces and bodies every time they open the app.

You Can Read Entire Article Here:

https://www.huffpost.com/entry/facetune-selfies-surgeries-body-dysmorphia_n_60926a11e4b0b9042d989d48?ncid=engmodushpimg0000006

GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- *In general, how does your group feel about the use of editing software like Facetune?*
- *What does your group think about this excerpt from the article: "Facetune makes it harder for her to love herself, but at least she can love her selfie"?*
- *Do you think males are impacted by seeing perfect images of other males online?*
- *The article mentioned that "Instagram's Explore feed is algorithmically curated to show users more of what they already look at, whether it's puppies, vegan meal plans or picture-perfect influencers. The result is an echo chamber.." What does your group think about this feature?*
- *What do you think about the new law in Norway that requires influencers and advertisers to label retouched images on social media? Does your group think other countries should enact similar laws? Why or why not?*