

MY LIFE

Girls Are Taking Drastic Measures To Achieve the Perfect Instagram Snap

How far would you go?

Kayleen Schaefer

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Artwork by [@bessnyc](#)

We present our best selves online — in or Insta-feeds we're all basically Beyonce — but lately, with the rise of simple-to-use photo-editing apps such as Facetune, there's pressure to make our best selves *even* better. In a few taps, it's possible to achieve flawless skin, gleaming teeth, standout eyes and pouty lips. With endless ways to digitally delete a pimple or an out-of-place hair in a selfie, *why would* you let your followers see the real you?

"People are more open about it now," says Paolina Russo, 20, a fashion student in London. "I was taking photos with my friends, and afterward she opened Photoshop and changed her face. It was something she was used to

doing. She had a method. You know your face, and you know your edited face.”

But looking one way online and another in the mirror may be making many young women despair about the disconnect. After all, those Likes aren't for the real you; they're for the Facetuned you. “If people are complimenting a girl for looking amazing in a photo that's been self-corrected, what does that say to the girl?” says Robyn Silverman, Ph.D., a body-image expert and the author of *Good Girls Don't Get Fat: How Weight Obsession Is Messing Up Our Girls and How We Can Help Them Thrive Despite It*.

Many might wonder what it would take to match their digital and IRL selves. And if it's possible that a cosmetic procedure might give them the same result a Facetune tap would, they could be open to it. In 2014, more than 160,000 teens ages 13 to 19 had cosmetic minimally invasive procedures, such as chemical peels, injectables and laser skin resurfacing, and more than 63,000 had surgical ones, such as nose reshaping or breast augmentation, according to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons.

“It is very common these days for young women to not just accept a photo taken of themselves as it is,” says Vivienne Lewis, D.Psych, a clinical psychologist in Australia and the author of *Positive Bodies: Love the Skin You're In*.

“There's an obsession with needing to touch it up and trying to perfect it as much as possible. This obsessiveness with appearance can lead to a desire to actually change their appearance in real life through plastic surgery or getting perceived flaws, such as freckles and spot marks, removed.”

Gloria Cavallaro, a creative consultant in her 20s, started fixating on the shape of her lips after regularly posting selfies in a creative series intended to showcase her makeup looks. To make her lips look more symmetrical and pillowy, she overdrew them with lip pencil, putting the line outside her natural shape. It wasn't long before she made the leap from exaggerating her lips with makeup to seeking permanent change. “In paying more attention to my lips, I was definitely moved to look into dermal filler to correct and plump them,” she says. “Selfie culture means you have to be camera-ready at all times.”

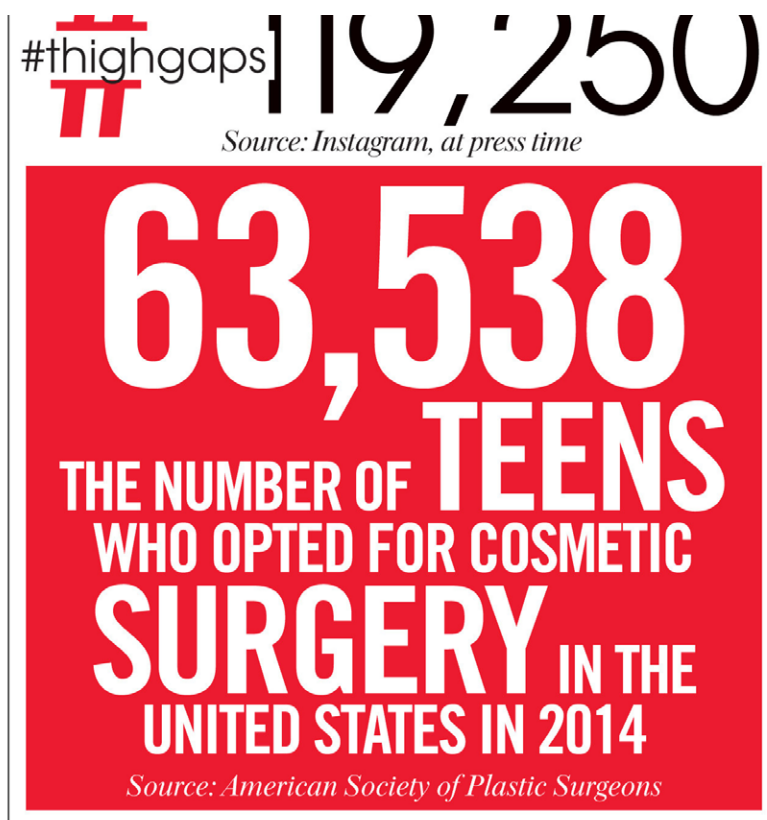
Gloria, who had already been going to a dermatologist for years to perfect her skin with chemical peels and laser

treatments, eventually decided to have hyaluronic acid injected in her lips. Now her actual lips look just like the ones she used to draw on.

Even after these procedures, however, Gloria continues to refine her image online with Facetune — specifically, she evens out her complexion and defines her eyes. “I’m a big Facetune fan,” she says.

Julie Russak, M.D., a dermatologist and the founder of Russak Dermatology Clinic in New York, has many patients in their late teens and early 20s looking to fine-tune their complexions. “This heightened focus on the appearance of skin comes from an obsession with filtered photos on Instagram,” she says. “We’re becoming preoccupied with the close-up of the face. It’s easy for my young patients to lose perspective. Sometimes I take away the mirror that’s in front of their face and put a big mirror far away from them. When the camera is close, all you can see that one imperfection.”





In addition to making us focus on minuscule flaws, Instagram has given rise to an unattainable beauty standard. It can be a constant scroll of unreal body parts — the pumped-up lips, the thigh gaps, and the yanked-in waists — that many women now aspire to have. Among the most followed and most influential augmented faces on Instagram is 18-year-old Kylie Jenner. Before she publicly admitted to using injectables, her noticeably enhanced lips sparked a social media phenomenon known as #KylieJennerChallenge in which people went to dangerous measures to temporarily inflate their own lips using a shot glass as a suctioning device. Kylie's televised admission triggered a record uptick in the popularity of Google searches globally for lip fillers.

“Many younger patients want enhancements and sometimes desire excessive procedures that may appear unnatural,” says Jessica Weiser, M.D., a dermatologist with New York Dermatology Group. “They’re at that age where some of them start to think they can control their appearance and enhance what they want. They often want a lot of lip filler, more intense laser treatments, stronger chemical peels, et cetera. We see these extremes in the media, and these images translate into real-life requests by young women aspiring to their cosmetic ideal.”

Jennifer*, 21, in New York, recently had rhinoplasty to make her nose smaller. She'd been self-conscious about her nose for five years before deciding to go through with the surgery. “It was always the first thing I would see in a picture,” she says. Whenever she thought it seemed too big, she deleted or untagged herself in the post. But Jennifer never used any photo-editing tools to envision what she might look like with a smaller nose. She knew the picture she'd see wasn't going to mimic what she'd look or feel like post surgery. “Using editing apps is temporary and instant,” Jennifer says. “There's no pain or investment involved. At the end of the day, they're

games. The thing about surgery is that the doctor can change only so much. In an app you can change things that would never be possible to alter in real life.”

Dana Suchow, a body-positive style blogger and the founder of dothehotpants.com, used to edit her photos so that she looked as perfect online as she wished she did while walking down the street. She made her stomach flat and her skin impeccable — an effort to fake her way to being just like the rest of the flawless creatures she saw in her social media feeds.”

Instead of making her feel better, though, faking her online images made Dana more upset about her actual body. “You post this beautiful edited picture of yourself in a dress, then you come back down to reality when you see yourself in the mirror and you don’t look like that. I felt like I was lying,” she admits.

“Our idea of what ‘real’ people look like is so warped these days. No one can tell what is real and what is fake anymore. lip jobs and nose jobs are setting the new standards of beauty.”

Instead of continuing to chase a false reflection, Dana decided to stop editing her pictures in an attempt to embrace herself just as she is — but she admits it can be tough sometimes. “There is an unattainable beauty ideal being shoved down our throats. To not follow that ideal is a form of revolution, and it is a very scary revolution to do on your own,” Dana explains. “When I’m not feeling great, it does seem like I’m the only person in the world who’s not perfect.”

The truth is, though, no one will look the same way IRL as they do in a Facetuned pic (even Beyonce’s been accused of editing her photos). And, as everyone who’s erased one perceived flaw and immediately moved on to obsessing about the next knows, perfection is a constantly moving target — it’s anyone’s guess what body part social media will make us fixate on next.

Plus, the idea of every girl going after the same beauty standard, whether it’s large lips or sharply contoured cheekbones, is depressing. It’s one thing to have the same flared jeans as your bestie, but having the same face as her — even if it’s only Instagram — is bound to make you both feel like soulless clones eventually. Keep in mind: The best photo of all is one where you look like *yourself*.

*Name has been changed.

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