# Selfie-editing apps intensify body image issues and mental health risks among young people



Abigail, a 21-year-old university student, embodies a common experience among her peers, frequently capturing selfies, enhancing them with specialised apps, and sharing them across social media platforms. She notes the profound influence these selfie-editing technologies have on perception: "You look at that idealised version of yourself and you just want it to be real. The more you do it, the better you get at it… the easier it is to actually see yourself as that version." This sentiment echoes a broader concern explored in recent research, revealing alarming consequences of these technologies on young people's body image and mental wellbeing.

The surge of selfie-editing apps such as Facetune, Faceapp, and Meitu has created an environment wherein young individuals meticulously curate their online personas. This obsession with visual perfection is largely driven by the overwhelming pressures of visibility in an interconnected digital world. The range of features these applications provide—everything from basic adjustments like lighting to far-reaching alterations that simulate cosmetic surgery—encourages users to engage in a series of micro-changes that can distort their self-image drastically.

In-depth research conducted by a team, including scholars from universities across Australia, involved interviews and workshops with 89 young participants aged 18 to 24. The study highlights that editing practices vary significantly; while some users opt for minor tweaks, others embrace dramatic alterations that can mimic cosmetic surgical procedures. One-third of interviewees admitted to making structural edits—changing facial dimensions to conform to societal beauty norms, reinforcing a troubling standard of beauty amongst their peers.

Participants reported that engaging with these technologies is crucial to expressing their identities. However, this pursuit of a polished online image comes with substantial emotional costs. As one participant noted, sharing altered photos is akin to saying "I’m here, I exist," yet the awareness of competing with a backdrop of "perfect bodies and perfect lives" weighs heavily on many. Young individuals increasingly believe that everyone’s images are edited, pushing them to perfect their own appearances to meet these unattainable standards.

This drive for visual perfection can lead to what is termed “Snapchat dysmorphia,” a phenomenon where individuals seek cosmetic surgery to align more closely with their filtered images. This blurring of reality and fantasy poses serious questions about the impact of social media on self-perception within contemporary society. Medical professionals have raised concerns that exposure to filtered realities, which often promote idealised traits such as fuller lips or smaller noses, is fostering unhealthy expectations among younger generations.

Research indicates a strong association between social media engagement and detrimental body image perceptions. Studies have shown that frequent users of platforms like Instagram or Snapchat report heightened levels of anxiety, self-objectification, and unrealistic body ideals, with young women particularly vulnerable to these damaging impressions. The combination of constant exposure to curated images and societal pressures may contribute to increased interest in cosmetic enhancements, such as fillers and Botox, as young individuals seek to replicate the flawless appearances they see online.

Emerging technologies, especially those utilising AI in beauty apps, amplify these complexities. These advanced tools have the capacity to provide users with highly detailed visualisations of "before and after" transformations, further entrenching discontentment with their natural appearance. This alteration in the relationship between technology and human experience raises serious concerns about its potential consequences on youth mental health, particularly in relation to body image.

As these trends continue to evolve, the urgent need for comprehensive examination and dialogue around the role of technology in shaping self-perception becomes increasingly clear. There is a pressing requirement not only to understand these impacts but also to promote a more inclusive and realistic notion of beauty within digital spaces.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7.
2. Paragraph 3.
3. Paragraph 4.
4. Paragraph 4.
5. Paragraph 3.
6. Paragraph 4.
7. Paragraph 4.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

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