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THE
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THE BEAUTY EXPERT

SNAPCHAT DYSMORPHIA

BEAUTY IS IN THE EYE OF THE SMARTPHONE

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As I sat in the plush surroundings of my consulting room in Harley Street, I wondered what she would look like. It's the same with every new patient – they are all unique, and all have their own ideas of what they'd like to change about themselves.

The one constant though, is that I have a real desire to give each and every one of my patients the results that they want – within reason.

Whilst it's good to want to be the best version of themselves, it's not good to be the best version of someone else.

I love seeing patients when they come back for their post-operative appointments, and where before, they were underconfident and self-conscious, they now have a renewed inner confidence. They walk tall and feel good about themselves.

When Gemma walked through the door, I did as I always do. I scrutinised her. Not to be critical of course, it's just part of my job as a cosmetic surgeon.

She looked to be in her early twenties. She was slim, had long brown, immaculately styled hair, was approximately 5'4", and dressed casually in jeans, trainers and a sweatshirt. All very expensive, designer brands though!

The overall appearance was good.

She greeted me with a lovely warm smile. But there was something else. Something wasn't right.

Behind that polished exterior there was an air of vulnerability. This pretty young woman couldn't see what everyone else could see. To her, she was imperfect. To her, she was a social media misfit.

She was almost apologetic about the way she looked.

In 2014 there were 150 million Instagram users. The average age of plastic surgery patients was 42 for women and 47 for men.

Today, just 5 years on, there are more than 800 million users. Most are aged between 18-29, and with the desire to pass the social media entrance exam, this has bucked a new trend.

The age of plastic surgery patients has fallen dramatically.

There is no doubt that this "Instagram culture" is influencing many younger patients. There's a desire to portray themselves in what they deem to be the best way possible, be that with lifestyle and fashion choices, or with the way they themselves look.

Smart phone filters can instantly improve these girls' appearance, albeit digitally.

Apps such as Snapchat blend reality with a digital fantasy of what you could be.

FaceTune creates a version of you which is comparable to looking in the mirror: move the phone around and at every angle you're still filtered. It's you, but it's not you.

The issue with this? They're not a permanent 'fix'.

But, they do plant a seed in the minds of many. Such is the norm of these filters and edits, that they've actually altering peoples' perception of beauty worldwide.

People think that if they can look that good temporarily with a smartphone filter, why can't they do something that will replicate that look on a more permanent basis?

The answer is that they can. But is it right?

Perhaps even more remarkable, is the fact that nowadays, girls often want their efforts to attain 'perfection' to be noticeable.

I call it the 'rich girl face'.

Along with designer clothes and handbags, the plumped up face and lips are deemed to be a symbol of wealth and status. They're to be worn with pride.

With a constant flow of perfect faces and beautifully sculpted features filling our TV screens and social media streams, it's no wonder cosmetic treatments are soaring in popularity among Millennials across the world.

This is backed up not just by an increase in the number of people opting for plastic surgery, but also a huge increase in non-surgical treatments, such as teeth whitening, Botox and dermal fillers.

But, with increased demand, comes increased risk.

More people are opting for cheaper treatments from under-qualified beauticians – with substantial risks to their health.

Injecting filler near the nose, among the maze of blood vessels that lie under our facial skin, carries Russian roulette-style dangers. Hit a blood vessel that feeds directly to the eye and you risk causing catastrophic damage. Once filler enters that critical vein, there's a window of just 90 minutes before irreversible retinal cell death occurs.

Travelling abroad for surgery is not uncommon. It's

usually a cheaper option, and whilst there are many very good surgeons throughout the world, there are also many who are not. The lure of the price though, often takes priority over the research that ought to be done when looking for your surgeon.

There are vastly different standards in other countries for training and accreditation than there are in the UK. What is and isn't acceptable to take place in the operating theatre can be different too.

Safety protocols may well be deficient, and bacteria in a foreign country might be resistant and more challenging to treat because your body has not developed the necessary antibodies.

It's often impossible for surgeons in the UK who are attempting to provide follow-up care to a patient who has had surgery abroad, to track down exactly what was done, where the surgery was performed, or which surgeon did it – often, and very disturbingly, patients don't even know the names of their surgeons.

As a plastic surgeon, my job is not to simply cut and shape a body or a face to fit an ideal, or to serve a social media trend. My job is to enhance a person's individual features, and bring out the inner beauty from within.

As Gemma sat opposite me explaining the look she was after, I couldn't help but feel a little sad.

Yes, her lips were a bit on the thin side, and the right amount of filler would look good. And yes, she would achieve more of a heart shaped face by plumping out her cheekbones. But no, her face had not dropped in the way it does in older women. Not even the 'mini-facelift' about which she was asking would be appropriate.

And yet, she had become so self-conscious about the way she perceived herself to look, that she refused to have her photo taken now.

Social media was on hold until she could conform to the Insta-norm. The imperfections she saw in herself, was simply not there.

Body Dysmorphic Disorder, I believe, is not helped

I believe plastic surgery should be performed for the right reasons. Those reasons being to increase self-confidence and to enhance physical features that you personally feel could be improved. Not because you would like to replicate the look of someone else or because another person has pressured and persuaded you into doing so.

by the pressures put on young women to conform.

Plastic surgery does not fix underlying mental and emotional issues.

Ultimately, I believe plastic surgery should be performed for the right reasons. Those reasons being to increase self-confidence and to enhance physical features that you personally feel could be improved. Not because you would like to replicate the look of someone else or because another person has pressured and persuaded you into doing so.

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