

“Zoom Dysmorphia”: the rise of a new issue amidst the pandemic

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To the Editor,

During the second half of the last decade, a phenomenon called Snapchat Dysmorphia was recognized among social media users who were influenced via filters to alter their own bodies (1). The ongoing pandemic of Coronavirus-2019 led to several changes in our lifestyles, including a work-from-home culture and online classes via lengthy hours of video conference calls. Even social events such as weddings have transitioned to these services as people adopted a safe approach for their loved ones, while sharing multiple life events with them. However, these long hours of staring at oneself can lead to some unsettling changes and perceptions on how one views oneself. The phenomenon dubbed as “Zoom Dysmorphia” was thus brought to life (2).

In an interview with TheGuardian, Dr. Shadi Kourosch, a board-certified dermatologist who also serves as an assistant professor at Harvard Medical School, shared that she noted that more patients wanted to consider changes about their appearance, including “nose jobs, smoothing out forehead wrinkles”, despite the ongoing pandemic. Thus, she raised several concerns about the long hours of looking at oneself via a camera, which may not provide a “true reflection of oneself” as it is more of “a distorted mirror”. Her team investigated the different ways that a camera on computers and phones can be positioned and noticed how the images can appear widely different and distorting (2).

A survey involving 134 care providers in the dermatology department confirmed that 56.7% of their

practices experienced a rise in the number of cosmetic consultations requests during the ongoing pandemic. 86.4% also added that their patients wanted those changes due to the video calls, with 82.7% of providers also confirming that the patients became unsatisfied and displeased by the way they looked since they transitioned to the use of video-conference calls. The most common procedures provided were “neuromodulators (such as Botox, 94%), dermal fillers (82.3%), and laser treatments (65.4%)” (3).

In 2020, Dr. Katharine Phillips, a psychiatrist from New York-Presbyterian Hospital warned about the possibility of a rise in Body dysmorphia, in those who are already affected and those at risk. She pointed out that even a small picture of our own face on such platforms can be a trigger for different perceptual changes (4).

Several small steps can be adopted and encouraged to reduce the risks of “Zoom Dysmorphia” and address the issue. Simple and easy methods on how to improve the image quality, such as the use of ring lights, higher resolution camera, as well as the positioning of the camera from the face while limiting the distortion, can vastly help (5). Alaokika Bharwani, a psychologist and counselor, also encouraged everyone to “avoid repeating any negative thoughts one may see on camera to oneself”, and instead focus on the quality of one’s work and appreciate other aspects of one’s life. The companies involved in video-conferencing should also play a role in tackling the issue. The Human Resources Department should promote mental wellbeing chats with their employees during this pandemic and employees should be able to keep their camera off unless required (6).

As the pandemic nears its second year of existence, the work-from-home practices and their use of video-conference calls will most likely be still used for the foreseeable future. It is thus essential to understand the issue, provide proper help to those harboring such feelings, and avoid stigmatizing anyone affected.

Finally, plastic surgeons and dermatologists should ensure that the patients are provided with adequate support, help, and understanding of the issue before performing any drastic procedures (1).

Conflicts of interest: Each author declares that he or she has no commercial associations (e.g. consultancies, stock ownership, equity interest, patent/licensing arrangement etc.) that might pose a conflict of interest in connection with the submitted article.

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