

## BEAUTY

# Zoom has a 'funhouse mirror' effect. And it's destroying our self-image.



Most Zoom calls go something like this: Your manager talks for 45 minutes. You stare at your own face for 40 of them.

*My under eye circles are insane. Is it the light? Maybe it's the light. Ugh, I have so many pimples on my chin. Omg WHY DO I HAVE SO MANY CHINS?*

It's all of us right now. And we can't look away. Yet we don't have a choice.

And it's the driving force behind a worrying new phenomenon - one that's occurring in many countries, particularly in those that have experienced extended lockdown periods.

It's called '[Zoom dysmorphia](#)'.

It's basically the new version of 'Snapchat dysmorphia' - a term that was coined in 2015 to describe the growing numbers of people who wanted to look like they had a face filter on IRL - big eyes, sparkling skin, the whole deal.

In a similar vein, Zoom dysmorphia refers to having a negative and distorted perception of one's self after prolonged time spent on video calls.

Read: Staring at our own faces on a screen all day, every day is wreaking major havoc on our self-esteem.

"Whilst Zoom dysmorphia isn't an official diagnosis, it's the latest platform to contribute to Body Dysmorphic Disorder and body image concerns," explains psychologist Georgie Lavan from [BodyMatters Australasia](#) and [The Indigo Project](#).

"When you're situated in front of a camera all day conducting meetings, it's quite unusual to have your reflection staring back at you for such lengthy periods. And when you've got a screen full of faces looking at you, it's very easy for someone with body image concerns to spend their time focusing on how they look compared to others on the screen."



**ERIN DOCHERTY**

Senior Health & Beauty Writer

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1 Comments

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**How Do I Get Rid Of Razor Burn?**

You Beauty

In the age of Zoom calls, Google Hangouts and Microsoft Teams, we've become inordinately obsessed over our facial features.

From our crooked teeth to the sagging skin around our neck, the size of our nose and the wrinkles across our foreheads - we're literally picking apart our facial features, day in and day out.

However, unlike Snapchat, where people are aware of the crazy filters and how they manipulate their features, chances are that people don't realise they're not looking at their true appearance.

## Looking through a distorted lens.

Dubbed the "fun-house mirror" effect, there are numerous ways Zoom can distort our appearance - everything from the lighting to the angle and how close we are to the camera, disguises how we really look.

As Lavan explains, "What often gets overlooked is that front-facing cameras are no different to a fun-house mirror. They're distorted images of ourselves and other people. Factor in the lengths people might go to with lighting and filters and you can understand how one might become preoccupied with their appearance during such a vulnerable time."

As pointed out by Dr Gabrielle M Caswell, clinical director at [Eyra Medical and Skin Clinic](#) and president of [Australasian College of Aesthetic Medicine](#), people are unconsciously accepting these images to be a true representation of themselves.

"The lighting is poor and casts unflattering shadows; your face is reflected back to you from an unnatural angle and, since we do not spend that much time looking at ourselves during the day, we tend to notice details we may not otherwise be aware of. The camera's perspective is never the finest, magnifying some features and distorting others," Dr Caswell said.

"Video conferencing tends to look 'up' at the face, showing every jowl and crease. People therefore become conscious about how they look to others via the screen and begin to accept and mistakenly believe that is how they look in real life," she adds.

The result? A whole new wave of people experiencing self-image issues.



Image: Getty

Being alone and in lockdown for a lengthy period of time also leaves people with time on their hands to reflect on their appearance and how they must look to others. Dr Caswell said this is where perceived imperfections become a magnified concern.

"The video conferencing projection is artificial and becomes their main perspective of how they believe they look to others, and, in extreme cases, this could be considered a form of Zoom dysmorphia," Dr Caswell said.

Just to put into perspective how worrying this phenomenon is, you only have to take a look at the recent spike in cosmetic surgery.

[The Cosmetic Physicians College of Australasia](#) (CPCA) recently conducted a survey that proved an unprecedented surge in clinics seeing the emergence of new patients seeking non and minimally invasive procedures during the last year.

According to the survey, there has been a massive 41.5 per cent increase in new patients who have never previously had aesthetic treatments.

Interesting, right?

It was also found that 65 per cent of the doctors who responded to the survey have found that patients are more frequently requesting multiple treatments per visit.

An overwhelming 75 per cent of patients are requesting a combination of anti-wrinkle injections and dermal fillers in the one treatment, with the next most common combinations at 8 per cent and 4 per cent.

To get a feel for how many people have either undergone or are considering a cosmetic procedure due to Zoom, we asked our *Mamamia* readers for their thoughts.

And the response was... overwhelming.

A huge number of people revealed they were planning on investing in their appearance post-lockdown, with concerns about wrinkles, weight gain and teeth high on the list - all attributed to Zoom.

*"I definitely think about what's possible after looking at my face so much! I usually have injectables in forehead but looking at my face makes me want more done to my jowls."* - Lana.

*"I've had to stop getting anti-wrinkle injections in my forehead while we've been lockdown. Looking in the mirror I'm actually pretty happy with my skin, but every time I see my forehead move while I'm on a Zoom call, my insecurities about wrinkles come back. I've already booked my injectable appointment for October as soon as lockdown is over."* - Daria.

*"I have seriously considered getting threads or a lift above one eyebrow to raise it because I realised one was naturally higher after being in Zoom meetings all day. I flipped my camera so I could get used to it, but then when I flipped it back - same problem."* - Rosie.

*"I've just dropped \$9,000 on Invisalign. My top teeth are perfectly straight, but my bottom teeth are not. I only realised how much they show when speaking from seeing myself on Zoom."* - Sarah.

*"[I'm] definitely looking into getting my double chin removed thanks to the Zoom meetings."* - Christina.

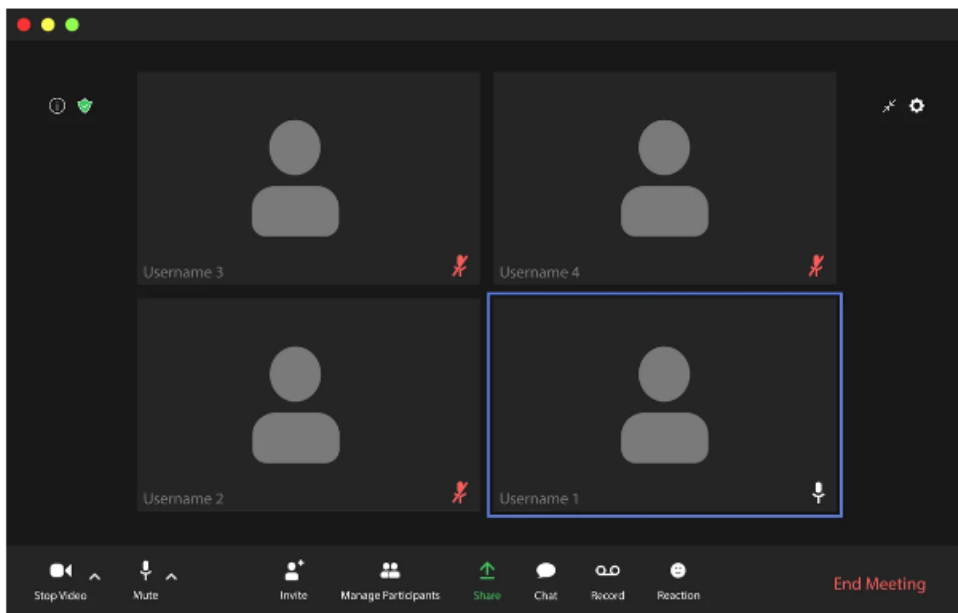


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According to Lavan, there's been a noticeable shift in people coming to her practice with specific concerns around facial features, rather than concerns about their body.

"What I've noticed when working with clients who are experiencing body image issues is a lot more talk about their body dissatisfaction being focused on their facial features," she said.

"They may have started noticing or commenting on changes in their appearance such as greys coming through, or fine lines and creases they've never noticed before."

## The forces behind Zoom dysmorphia.

As explained by Dr Caswell, the force behind the increase in procedures and our perceived appearance of flaws is not straightforward - it's actually quite a complex and multi-layered issue.

"The drivers behind this may be many things: Perhaps the first is studying one's face in minutia, with enlarged detail, in an unflattering light that video conferencing excels at," she said.

"The second, which I think may be more important, is people want to look their best when they re-engage social contact. It appears people want to present themselves as the version they find most attractive, for themselves, when they re-meet the world."

In a study published in *International Journal of Women's Dermatology*, research found that 71 per cent of the 7,000 people surveyed were anxious or stressed about returning to in-person activities, and that nearly 64 per cent had sought mental health support.

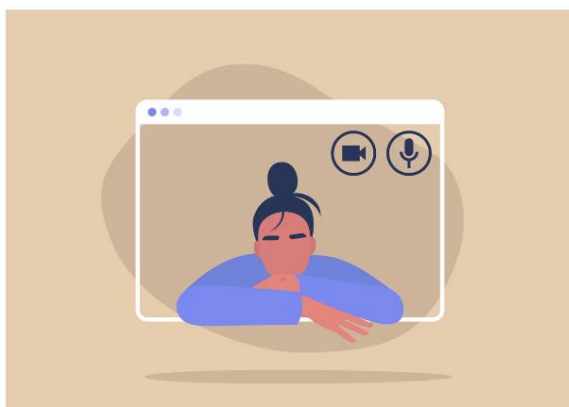


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It was found that three in 10 people planned to invest in their appearance as a coping strategy to deal with returning to in-person events.

Dr Caswell goes on to say, "We know from previous research, if people feel attractive they are more confident and engaging, and more likely to make the most of social situations. It's not inconceivable that in the artificial world of lockdown, some of that confidence may have diminished, so in some respects I would view it as getting ready to 'face the world' in a confident way."

And for a lot of people, Lavan said COVID has provided the opportunity not only to work from home, but also the opportunity to save money.

"It's provided people with the opportunity to explore making changes to their appearance such as dermatological procedures, or even plastic surgery, under the discretion of lockdown and not having to see their family, friends or colleagues whilst they are treated and recover," said Lavan.

In her personal practice, Dr Caswell said she has had established patients (who might attend for skin cancer services, for example), requesting aesthetic treatment information, often quite uncharacteristically.

"This trend appears to be across all age groups and genders. I naturally ask why, with the most common answer being to 'treat themselves'. As the options of travel or eating out are limited, patients are diverting their funds to something that in 'normal' circumstances may not have been allocated in their budget and have had more time to consider what they may like or not like on their face."

In terms of some of the most common cosmetic requests from patients, Dr Caswell it's all about erasing 'reminders' of the pandemic.

"So far the most common request is reducing the 'lockdown frown'. People are feeling they are wearing their weariness on their faces, their unpleasant and long experience of uncertainty is leaving its mark."

"And almost like a bad dream, they do not want a physical reminder of the lockdown periods and associated anxiety it brings. One of the fortunate things about the lockdown situation is people have time to conduct a lot of research before they ask questions in practice, and I find they are still looking for realistic rather than extreme options."

## **Is Zoom dysmorphia a mental health disorder?**

During the pandemic, the twisted images of Zoom combined with the fact that we are constantly (even more so in lockdown) bombarded by heavily curated and distorted images on social media, has undoubtedly had a damaging effect on our self-esteem, self-perception, anxiety and mental health.

*As Mamamia reader Alex told us: "I find it SO hard to keep my camera on during a Zoom meeting. I already have body image issues, and it is really impacting my mental health. I cannot concentrate properly on the meeting because I keep looking at my 'imperfections'.*

*"It is an absolute nightmare. I keep my camera off during large meetings and sometimes have to 'be on my phone which has a broken camera' sometimes. I can't even keep it on for my psychologist. It is really tough to Zoom with friends after Zoom-ing for work."*

Drawing on the impact of social media combined with Zoom, Lavan said "I think a lot of people want to come out of COVID lockdown being better versions of themselves, whether that's being able to upskill professionally, learn a new language, or feel better within their body."

"Social media has been a way to connect and with increased time to scroll and compare ourselves to others, it's another platform to engage in upward or downward comparisons – seeing someone's appearance and asking yourself whether it's "better" or "worse" than yours."

According to Dr Caswell, while Zoom has been a great tool for combatting lockdown loneliness and lack of purpose, the disadvantages it has had when it comes to our mental health is apparent.

"The downside to our incredibly visual community - we visualise our news with pictures and videos, our social lives and now our working lives - is that we hold ourselves up to standards that perhaps are unique to an individual and not realistic for many," said Dr Caswell.

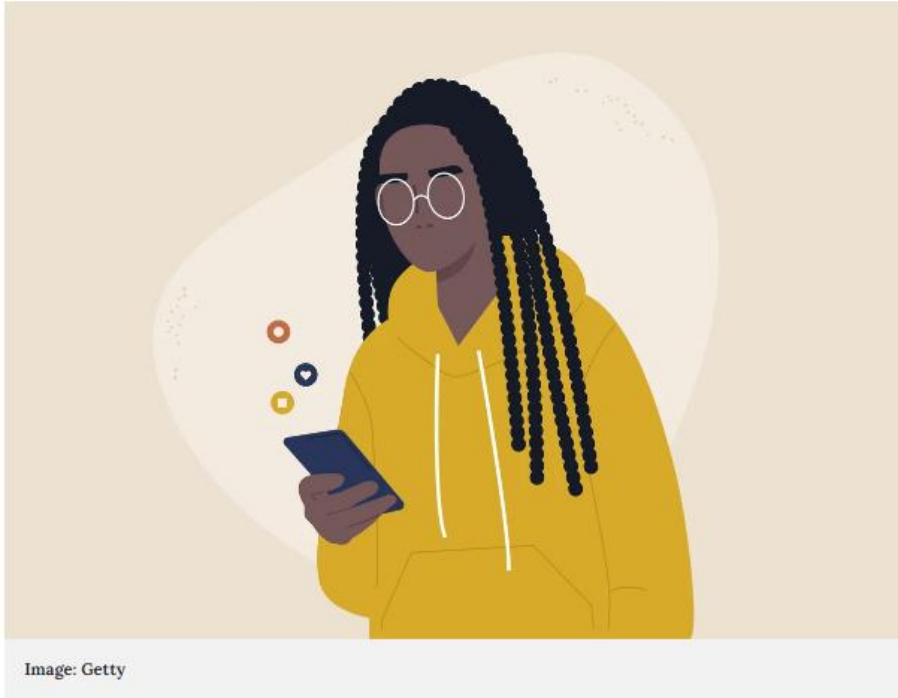


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"We are also in a cultural period where self-criticism, post modernist and catastrophe politics prevail, along with general low morale. I think that people feel the one thing they can control is their visage, but their markers of beauty must be broad, because beauty is a broad brush."

"Humans are made with diversity and we should keep that in mind and appreciate it. And like most things, a little is good while a lot requires some examination of motivation and whether the situation - from a mental health perspective - is reactive or protracted and may need some untangling."

While it doesn't feel like an issue that's going to go anywhere anytime soon, Lavan said there are small steps we can make to help re-wire our focus on appearance.

"I think it's important for all of us is to work on non-appearance based compliments," she said.

"It's so easy to jump into a meeting and comment on someone's makeup, hairstyle, skin or outfit. What we need to be mindful of is the vulnerable people around us who may see these compliments as a validation to their self-worth."

Of course, when it comes to your face and your body - it's your choice, and it's important to make a decision that's right for you. Just keep in mind that you're not alone - other people are feeling the same way, too.

For those who want to go through with cosmetic procedures, Dr Caswell says to ensure you do your research and keep in mind the recommendations between vaccinations with fillers and injectables.

"Above all, enjoy socialising again, and don't be too hung up on the Zoom's perspective. That's not real life."

*What do you think of Zoom dysmorphia? What's your experience? Share with us in the comment section below.*

*Feature image: Getty*

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