ZIPPED

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LETTER FROM EDITORS

Why do we seem to contemplate our youth right as it's escaping us? With the last few weeks of college approaching, many of us have been reflecting on our time at Syracuse and how the hell we got to this moment… This isn't just the end of college, but the end of our youth, the end of our innocence, and the ultimate end of an era.

At the end of every era, we're flooded with nostalgia for our past selves. Grappling with not only the fond memories but also the painful ones is all a part of the experience. Whether it was the butterflies of a first kiss, driving around playing music with nowhere to go, or the rise of social media, our teenage years were a whirlwind of emotions that truly left their mark. You can't help but feel some nostalgia for the sense of potential and possibility that encompassed that time of life. It's hard to think about our youth without longing for the simplicities of then, a period before the complexities of true young adulthood kicked in.

As the two of us sat down and brainstormed themes for what our last edition of ZIPPED should be, we looked back on not only our time at Syracuse, but also our personal lives before college, and how we could use what we've learned to inspire our final issue of a magazine that saw us both grow into who we are today. We both have a passion for fashion, art, and culture, but, at the root of it all, a passion for sharing stories. Connecting this edition with our own lives and the shared collective experiences of our team was at the forefront of our minds when creating this issue.

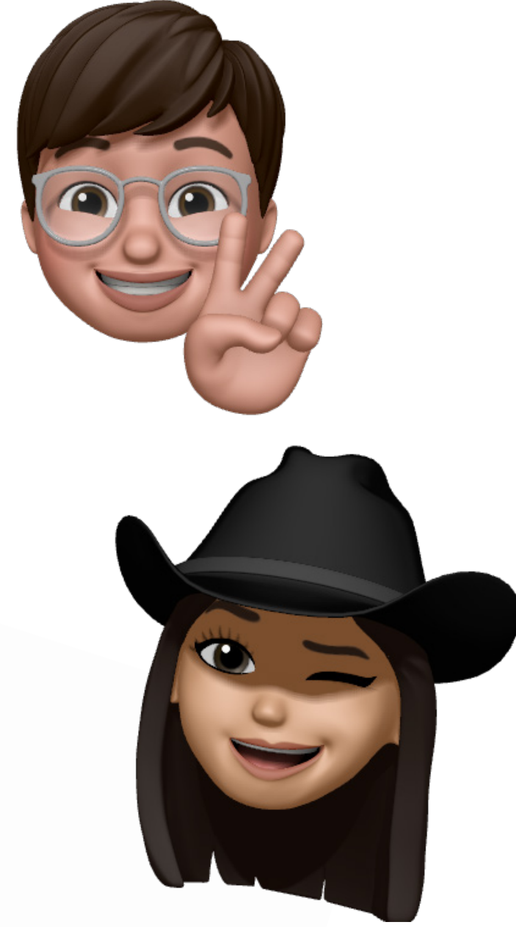
It feels as though both of our lives have led to this moment and this edition of ZIPPED. Coming from completely different backgrounds yet bonding over experiences from our past, we used this issue to consider what it means to be young in the digital age and reflect on the lessons we've learned in college – lessons that we now carry with us as we prepare to embark on our next journeys.

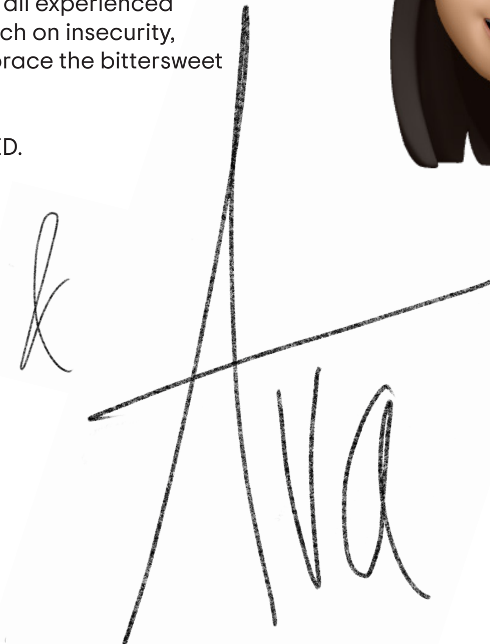
Within this issue of ZIPPED, we delve into the relationship between teenagers and the media— not only how the media shapes the youth's tastes and style, but also their identities and how we as a generation have shaped this new era of online presence. We explore our generation's obsession with capturing the moment while emphasizing the need to live in the present. While also celebrating our youth, this issue challenges us to confront the lessons of our past and carry them into the future.

As we say goodbye to this chapter, we hope that our final edition of ZIPPED will serve as a reflection of the joys, challenges, and transformations we've all experienced during our adolescence. Hopefully, while reading stories that touch on insecurity, personal taste, and youth culture at large, you're inspired to embrace the bittersweet beauty of moments that have come and gone.

We are so proud to present to you the "teenAGE" edition of ZIPPED.

With <3,
your Editors in Chief





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the internet as performance art

On social media, online identities can help users build community. But can they also make us more performative and drive us further apart?

By Isabel Bekele

In 2019, Racquel Alvarado was feeling a bit directionless. She had just finished a degree in political science and was about to begin a master's degree in legal theory. Racquel, who works in public policy, is based in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, a Canadian province located smack dab in the middle of the country's sprawling prairie land. Far from Canada's urban hubs, Alvarado was craving a creative outlet that could feed her interests in a way that her day job couldn't.

"I had a job that was related to my degree, but I wasn't necessarily getting to use my creative side," says Alvardo. "I didn't feel like I had an outlet to explore who I was outside of academia because I thought I would be in academia forever."

In 2021, Alvardo decided, perhaps unknowingly, to join in on an internet trend that was growing in popularity: creating a secondary social media account as a means of self-expression. She opened a "bookstagram" account dedicated to reviewing novels, the first being Sally Rooney's *Beautiful World Where Are You?*

"That was my first time splintering off my identity a little bit," says Alvardo.

Today, Alvardo's "splintered off" internet identity has exceeded her expectations for a creative outlet. On TikTok, she's now better known as @solitary_daughter, the username under which she posts musings on internet culture to her more than 10,000 followers. What began for Alvardo as a second Instagram account has blossomed into a part-time writing career, one that now includes a twice-weekly newsletter, an online literary magazine, and a fast-growing audience on both Instagram and TikTok, where she has a combined follower count of over 27,000.

"It was terrifying to share writing online," she remembers. " Having a way to almost personify yourself does create a little bit of a safety barrier, almost."

In 2024, the idea of everyone from writers to chefs having–and possibly even needing– an online brand identity has been normalized. For working professionals, content creators, and everyday internet users alike, creating a separate social media persona can be used to grow careers, find community, or express a different side of yourself. But through this proliferation of online alter egos, the chasm between who we are in real life and who we are when we're online may be growing even wider.

Professor Henry Jenkins, a USC journalism professor who's written over 20 books on media and popular culture, argues that technology has always enabled users to show up as different versions of themselves, even before social media. Citing everything from early video games with customizable avatars to the invention of email, Jenkins emphasizes that this behavior isn't new, but with the acceleration of social media, is evolving.

"Our everyday self is made up of multiple performances of multiple identities," says Jenkins. "One of the things the internet did though, was force some of those identities in collision with each other."

The question of whether creating online identities is making us feel more connected or further apart isn't a simple one to answer. While some research blames social media for increased loneliness and depression among members of Gen Z, Jenkins points out that technology has also enabled different groups to interact with the world in new ways.

"That's the contradiction we've seen from the beginning of the internet," he says. "It both connects us and isolates us in varying degrees for varying people."

Even for internet users who aren't trying to build a career off of social media, the inclination to splinter off different versions of themselves online still exists. Key examples of this include the early 2010s adoption of "finstas", which are spam Instagram accounts where people post more unfiltered content than they would on their main Instagram. Similarly, photo dump accounts, where users post photos that don't make the cut to their main account, are another prime example of how this trend has filtered down to everyday users.

"I think both are a signal of being exhausted with the performance of social media," says Kathryn Lindsay, a journalist who covers the internet.

Lindsay, who writes a monthly internet culture column for Vulture, points to growing up on the internet as a root cause for trends like these existing. "I think we're all inclined to think of ourselves as brands, even if we're a regular person," she says.

For users like Racquel Alvarado, creating an online persona has resulted in not only finding the creative outlet she's always wanted but also finding a community that she can share her interests with. In her view of the internet, getting what you want out of it has to include giving something up as well.

"I think we all are drawn to finding communities online," she says. "Maybe that's part of the alter ego thing too– I think you have to give a little bit of yourself so that people feel like you're not just this faceless entity."

WISH ME LUCK
RDX
RDX

QUEEN
BALENCIAGA

How To Maintain Taste In The Digital Age

On social platforms, trying on new aesthetics is easier than ever.

By Samantha Romano and Isabel Bekele

In the era of digitalization, a crucial question arises: What parts of our identity are truly shaped by our own choices? Social media platforms have become so algorithmically tailored to users' tastes that it can feel like discovering new interests doesn't happen naturally. It's easier than ever to lose one's sense of self to something more collective. Ask anyone to describe their style, music taste, or even behavioral habits, and their response more than likely aligns with the contents of their feed.

Taste can be broadly defined as aesthetic judgments that we develop based on our preferences and values. It's an elusive and slippery thing, one that's always been used as a marker of our identity. Because of social media, signifying what your tastes are, or at least what tastes you aspire to, has never been easier. On social platforms, taste-making becomes public. Through liking, reposting, following, tagging, and commenting, we can use the engineering of platforms to save and bookmark inspiration, creating digital scrapbooks of aesthetics we may want to buy into in the future.

No place is this more evident than in fashion's relationship to TikTok, where microtrends are born and die with an impressively swift life span. From stealth wealth to clean girl to trad wife, aesthetics not only represent stylistic choices, but lifestyle ones too. Do you summer in New England? Go to Pilates and use red-light therapy? Believe that women should stay in the kitchen? On the platform, trends like quiet luxury, for example, can start as cheeky and harmless style experimentation before evolving into a spirited discourse about class and consumerism.

Fashion isn't the only aspect of culture victim to this algorithmization. Music, being transformed in real-time by the use of TikTok sounds, is another example of how our tastes are being informed by social media. In 2022, a video of Steve Lacy performing his hit Bad Habit went viral after audiences appeared only to know the hook of the song— AKA, the part that had been used in millions of TikToks. While the

artist has since rejected the notion that his fans only know him for his virality, the moment indicated a larger trend within music.

“When there’s a really catchy and dynamic chorus, that’s the one that’s going to be clipped,” says Sophie Cohen, a Creative Sync assistant at Kobalt Music. “It makes sense that the hook is what’s going to go viral, especially when there are millions of videos being made.”

There’s an argument to be made that social media is expanding taste rather than stifling it. After all, it’s easier than ever to develop a new way of dressing or discover a new artist when infinite content is at our fingertips. Platforms also have a way of democratizing taste– with the digital space offering so much, metropolitan hubs are no longer the only places that yield and define cultural trends.

If you find yourself in a rut, stylistically or otherwise, taking some time off of social media may be a good way to reset and rediscover your taste organically. After all, there’s a world of inspiration outside of the feed.

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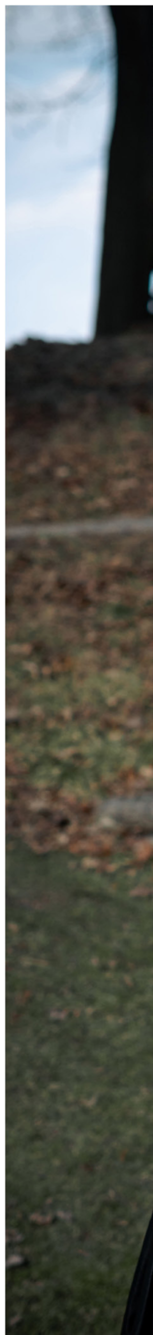

Get twisted in our Z maze! Can you escape to the other side?

START

FINISH

SDK PAINTS

Self-acceptance

SELF-ACCEPTANCE IS THE NEW SKINCARE STANDARD

Buzzy brands and skin influencers are changing how younger generations approach skincare.

By Mia Tiano

Adolescence: the age of angst, awkwardness, and, of course, acne. While skincare struggles are ubiquitous with coming of age, we've all had the experience of looking in the mirror, only to feel the world come crashing down after spotting an improperly placed zit. It's not our fault, either- for decades, acne has been stigmatized as being unclean, unattractive, and something to hide at all costs.

But while previous generations relied on our moms' skincare stashes and magazine "How To's" to learn how to eradicate acne, the tide may be turning for today's youth, who have turned largely to social media platforms like TikTok for all their skincare needs. And it's not just beauty tips they're finding— thanks to the rise of "skin positivity" influencers and Instagrammable skincare brands that target younger demographics, young people today, especially Gen Alpha, are seeking authenticity from skincare companies and changing attitudes towards skin imperfections.

The global skincare market, currently valued at $146.7 billion, is on the rise now more than ever. According to market research, the industry is set to increase by 6.7% by 2031. But amidst this growth, the industry is also being forced to evolve to match consumers' shifting expectations.

In an age where it feels like a celebrity skincare line is announced every few hours, there have been more marketing snafus than the skincare world would like to admit. In 2019, actress Millie Bobby Brown was bombarded with backlash on social media for allegedly faking her skincare routine in a video promoting her beauty line Florence by Mills. Fans understandably felt slighted- after all, who wants to buy a celebrity product that the star themself doesn't even use?

As this PR nightmare was only one of plenty, it's not hard to imagine why current skincare consumers would rather be marketed products by people who are closer in proximity to them than, say, a celebrity actress. This shift has led to social media influencers today sharing their unfiltered, personal beauty struggles to connect with their followers.

"I feel like everyone looks at acne as something that's ugly, but I see it as a part of growing up," says Faith MacKimm, a sophomore at Syracuse University.

"What made me feel better [about my skin] was seeing people like Alix Earle who blew up at the same time that I was struggling with acne. I liked that she was getting fame for being normal, while also talking about her skin problems."

In addition to influencers changing the conversation around acne, skincare brands are going the extra mile to embrace imperfections. Starface, a skincare company founded in 2019, is most famous for its star-shaped hydrocolloid patches that are meant to treat blemishes while also acting as a face accessory. Everyone from Justin Bieber to Dua Lipa has been spotted with the patch, and the brand has also done collaborations with the likes of Devon Lee Carlson and the Hello Kitty Brand.

Ella Lescinskas, a sophomore at Syracuse University, has found that Starface's innovative approach not only addresses skincare concerns but also promotes self-acceptance.

"It's almost like wearing your confidence on your face," Lescinskas says. "I see celebrities wearing them, but I also see people around campus wearing the patches to class. It's a constant reminder that beauty comes in all shapes and sizes."

Skincare company Bubble is another brand that has been reflecting changing skincare trends. The company has risen in popularity partially because of "Sephora kids," AKA the gaggles of tweens who raid Sephora in search of brands like Drunk Elephant and Sol de Janeiro.

Clara Miranda, Junior Social Media Coordinator at Bubble, says she didn't realize how many kids on TikTok were being influenced to buy skincare until she started working in the industry.

"We need to be careful of what kids are putting on their faces. That's who Bubble is for: young kids who don't need harsh ingredients but still want to practice self-care," Miranda said. "We were recently the first skincare brand to come out with an age requirement on our products because it's become such an issue with kids and the active ingredients that they are unknowingly putting on their face."

While Gen Z is the most easily persuaded demographic, Gen Alpha overshares and is fascinated by the world of micro-influencers, says Miranda.

With the abundance of skincare products and information available online, Dr. Anna Guanche, a dermatologist based in Calabasas, CA, advises young adults to follow the rule of "less is more."

"There has been a rising trend with young adults, teens, and pre-teens wanting to take care of their skin with intricate skin care regimes," says Dr. Guanche. "While the internet can sometimes have a positive effect on this, this demographic needs to do their research before committing to a specific routine."

Some legacy brands are attempting to address this concern. In March, Dove joined forces with actress Drew Barrymore, social media creators, dermatologists, and self-esteem specialists to launch the #TheFaceofTen campaign. The ongoing project aims to draw awareness to the societal pressures put on young children, as they are exposed to adult skincare content that is becoming a poor influence on their confidence and routines.

Syracuse University student Lescinskas says she wishes people her age understood how normal acne struggles are, but acknowledges that new skincare creators and companies are making a difference.

"The media's pressure to have perfect skin starts early," Lescinskas said. "But it's the skin-positive influencers and brands who promote imperfectly perfect skin that are shifting the narrative and making a footprint in the industry and beyond."

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"FOR MONEY"
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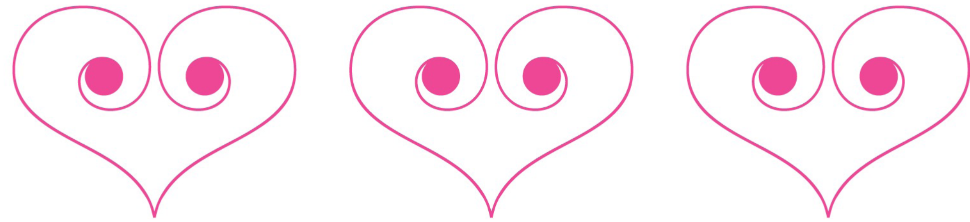
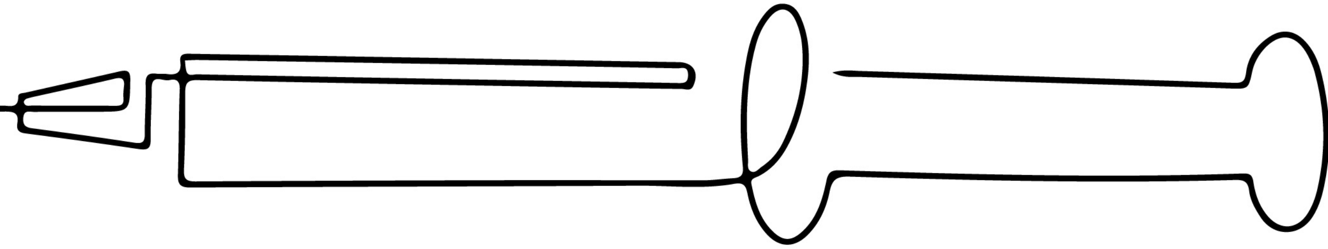
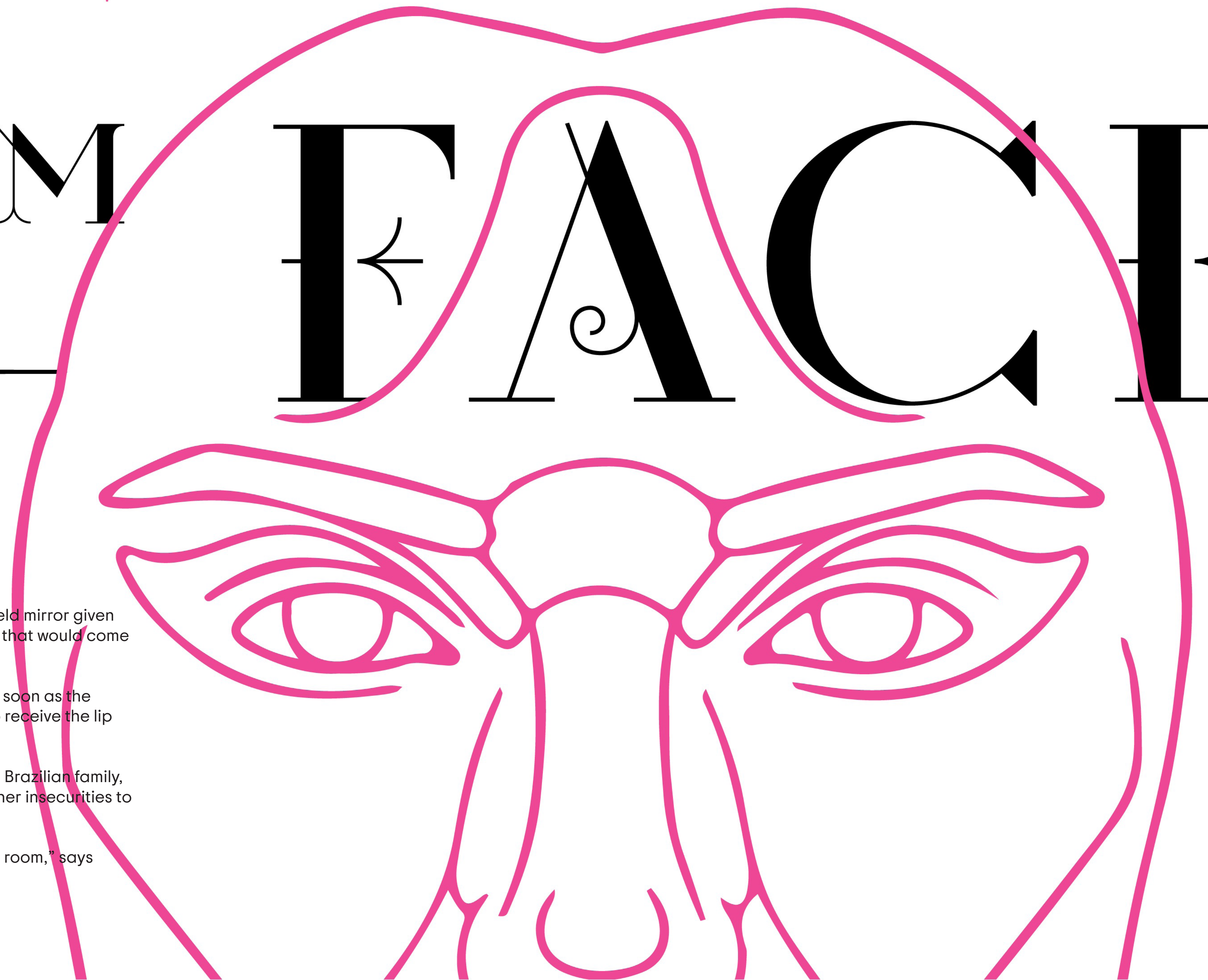
FADS, FILLERS, AND INSTAGRAM FACE







FADS, FILLERS, AND INSTAGRAM FACE

How social media is making young people more comfortable with going under the knife.

By Stella Ringblom

Laying on a reclining seat in a Boca Raton doctor's office, Camila Neuhaus Ferreira gripped hard onto the handheld mirror given to her by her nurse. As she clutched the mirror with white knuckles, she kept her eyes closed, anticipating the prick that would come after a numbing cream was gently applied to her thin lips.

Although she had warned her nurse of a fear of needles, she was still surprised when, due to nerves, she fainted as soon as the needle hit her face. "Scared of needles" was not an understatement, her nurse quickly realized. However, eager to receive the lip filler treatment she had long waited for, Ferreria recovered, and the process continued.

Ferreira, a senior at Syracuse University, is no stranger to the world of fillers, botox, and plastic surgery. Born into a Brazilian family, Ferrerira says there was no stigma or controversy regarding these topics growing up. So when Ferreira expressed her insecurities to her parents, neither saw a reason for her not being able to have her desired transformation.

"I was very insecure about myself until I started getting work done, and I never saw myself as the prettiest girl in the room," says Ferreira, who in addition to lip filler, has also had her breasts done and gotten filler in her jaw and cheekbones.

"My intentions were never to change how I looked completely. I was changing my insecurities about myself that made me insecure in high school."

Ferreira's transformations are a part of the millions of cosmetic procedures performed yearly in the U.S. While originally intended to treat patients with deformations from traumatic injuries, cosmetic surgeries saw a steady rise in popularity in the 1970s, especially among the rich and famous. Through the 2000s, plastic surgery surged enormously, with cultural attitudes among both surgeons and patients shifting towards more acceptance. Mere decades later, Americans had reached a point where, according to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, they had spent $16.5 billion on cosmetic surgery in 2018 alone.

With the introduction of social media, young people are more attuned to their perceived physical flaws, and therefore more intent on fixing those flaws, than ever. A generation raised amidst phenomenons like selfies, Snapchat filters, and FaceTune has resulted in a demographic that's hyper-aware of their features in a way that previous generations have not been. In 2022, a survey from the American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery found that 75% of facial plastic surgeons reported a rise in the number of patients under the age of 30 who were seeking injections and cosmetic procedures.

The link between social media use and a rise in plastic surgery is perhaps best described by the concept of "Instagram Face." Instagram Face, coined by writer Jia Tolentino in a viral 2019 article for The New Yorker, refers to a certain look. The look has catlike eyes, full lips, a small nose, and racial ambiguity; Tolentino blames the internet for creating "a single, cyborgian face" that many women now have, and even more want to achieve.

"It seems like an inevitable response to their exposure to unrealistic beauty standards at very early ages," says Harriet Brown, a Syracuse University journalism professor whose past writing has focused on body image. "When you look at edited, photoshopped images of "beauty" all day long, it's a natural response to feel like you too should look like that. I think it's tragic, to be honest, that so many young people are doing this," says Brown.

But while critics have pointed to content creators for upholding unattainable beauty standards, women like Laura Galebe, a Syracuse University alum and influencer based in New York City, say that isn't always the creator's fault.

"As humans, it's natural for us to compare ourselves to others; it's part of being human," says Galebe. "I can't control that."

Galebe first made her presence on TikTok during her senior year of college. Although she never thought she'd make a career out of social media, she was always drawn to creating content online.

Galebe is known on the platform for her "glow-up series", where she gives her audience tips on things like using a guasha to achieve a defined jawline and glowy skin. In these videos, she frequently
mentions which products to buy, which workouts to do, and how to elevate one's daily routines.

Similarly to Ferreira, Galebe has also paid a few visits to the plastic surgeon's office. Unlike Ferreira, though, Galebe is a somewhat public figure, meaning her appearance is commented on more frequently, and her attitudes toward plastic surgery are more publicly challenged.

"I'm a huge advocate for plastic surgery; if you want to get it done, go get it done," says Galebe. "Why not? If you can do something to make yourself feel better, do it."

Just as she's transparent about her favorite ab workouts and anti-wrinkle creams, Galebe finds it just as important to be honest with her audience about the cosmetic procedures she has undergone.

"I think it would be a problem if I were coming online and doing all these things to look prettier or to feel better about myself and claim that it was a cream or because of a juice I'm now drinking," she says.

Galebe claims that investing in cosmetic surgeries is no different than investing in a new skincare routine or trying a new diet. The common denominator between the three is finding ways to improve yourself.

Because social media trends have hyper-specified the cosmetic procedures patients are seeking, the responsibilities of plastic surgeons now include acting as guardrails against patients' outlandish requests. Rather than feed into their patients' delusions, surgeons like Dr. Brandyn Dunn, a facelift and neck contouring specialist from Newport, California, are mindful of the procedures they allow their patients to undergo.

"I don't try to perform trendy procedures, and I don't try to make things look stylized or excessive," says Dr. Dunn, who has his own TikTok account where he creates plastic surgery-related content.

Dr. Dunn says plastic surgeons also need to assess their patients psychologically to make sure they have the right motives for a procedure. "One of the biggest things that we worry about is something called body dysmorphia, where you have a belief that there's something wrong with your body and that even if you get it fixed, it's not going to be any better."

To doctors like Dunn, it's important that both the patient and surgeon carefully evaluate the reasons why the individual wants to undergo the procedure to ensure that they don't make a decision they'll later regret because they were influenced by something they saw online.

While creators are facing more accountability to own up to the work they've done, influencers like Galebe are unphased, and use their platform to normalize going under the knife.

"Someone's beauty doesn't take away from yours, but getting work done is totally acceptable if there is a part of yourself that you're unhappy with," she says."It's beyond normal for you to want to change something about your body."

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