

Zoom Boom Driving Self-Absorption Crisis

If you thought you were sick of Zoom calls due to eye strain and the constant struggle to avoid talking over your coworkers, friends, or family members, you've escaped relatively unscathed.

For many people, the frequent exposure to their own face while talking has driven them to some drastic measures. Plastic surgeons around the world are reporting a huge increase in demands for their services in what [*The Washington Post* is calling a "Zoom boom."](#) Botox injections, face-lifts, nose jobs—anything to make one's own face a bit more bearable in that tiny window on the bottom right corner of your call screen.

When the COVID-19 pandemic shutdowns were at their peak, all elective surgeries and even some medically necessary—but non-critical—procedures were canceled or delayed to prepare hospitals for a COVID surge. Now it seems the populace has had enough of that, and the contemporary crisis of self-absorption and vanity can continue with increased vigor.

Just how bad is the plastic surgery surge? A doctor in Cincinnati has doubled the number of days he is scheduled to be in the operating room and drastically expanded his total hours in order to keep up with demand, the *Post* reports. Likewise, an Australian surgeon has doubled his staff to meet a 200 percent patient increase.

This is a new addition to the long list of ailments that America is suffering due to our collective disconnect from the real, functioning world. We were already addicted to social media and selfie culture long before government lockdowns forced us to adopt a heightened digital lifestyle. Now that

many of us have been secluded for months on end, is it any wonder that our priorities have shifted even further to the narcissistic?

The problem of 21st century narcissism [is discussed](#) by Jack Trotter in an article for Chronicles. He identifies Big Tech companies such as Facebook and Apple as a primary driver of this phenomenon, including the knock-on effect of vanity's poisoning of American family life:

Today, the most pernicious of these forces are the Big Tech companies, global in their reach and ubiquitous, almost omnipotent, in their penetration of the most intimate realms of private and familial life. Where is the parent who has the strength of character to refuse his or her children access to a cell phone? Yet these cunning devices, which fit so snugly in a pocket or purse, are the most effective means yet contrived for severing adolescents from the bosom of the family and introducing them to a realm of fabricated idols—a realm in which new identities can be adopted every day with the swipe of a screen.

When our focus shifts from real-life interactions with actual physical people to the attentions of those who populate the digital realm, what we value about ourselves starts to change. This is likely related to what plastic surgeons are now observing. Online, we can stare at ourselves and contemplate every flaw in our features in minute detail. In the real world, there are far more pressing problems and joys to be found than contemplating our jaw line or bemoaning the shape of our nose. Truly, this is the “vanity of vanities” the teacher in Ecclesiastes discusses. The teacher [goes on to say](#):

All things are wearisome;
more than one can express;
the eye is not satisfied with seeing,
or the ear filled with hearing.
What has been is what will be,

and what has been done is what will be done;
there is nothing new under the sun.
Is there a thing of which it is said,
'See, this is new'?
It has already been,
in the ages before us.
The people of long ago are not remembered,
nor will there be any remembrance
of people yet to come
by those who come after them.

Even prior to the pandemic, many of us were burdened with a weariness hard to express. The things of the world did not fill up our hearts, although many tried to fill them with even more consumption and alterations of their bodies in order to fulfill some ill-conceived ideal.

Now, while locked away from each other, we humans no doubt have a natural tendency to focus more on ourselves. This is natural, for our own needs and experiences simply take up a greater portion of our day-to-day lives when we are not allowed to experience the lives of others.

But this move towards vanity is *only* a tendency, and like any other sinful tendency, we have the ability to choose whether we give into our impulses or resist them. Technology and isolation encourage such tendencies, but they cannot force us to accept them. But community, and especially community both with and centered upon Christ, is a cure for a great many ills. If everyone sought to reflect Christ's goodness in their lives, rather than attempting to regain or obtain fleeting beauty in our faces, the world would have many more saints, and subsequently, fewer plastic surgeons.

In this time, as in all times, we must choose to pursue virtue. Isolation makes it easy to let virtue slide, but staying connected with loved ones and friends will aid us in such a worthy pursuit. In so doing, let us all ensure our

attentions on Zoom calls are focused on the people we seek to stay connected with, and not on our own images.

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