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NEW YORK OBSERVER

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NOTHING SACRED BUT THE TRUTH

JULY 16, 2012

Harvard Gets Schooled

AS TECHIES FLOCK TO STANFORD, MIT, EVEN PENN. CRIMSON GOES GREEN WITH ENVY

Can Ivy Leaguers groomed for success navigate the failure-friendly tech economy?

By Kelly Faircloth

On a clear November day, the hard-working students of Harvard College took a collective study break and poured onto the walkway in front of Lamont Library. Undergrads, an inordinate num-



Corner Store Pledge Drive

SMALL BUSINESSES LOOK TO CROWDFUNDING FOR IMPROVEMENTS

What ever happened to just shopping there?

By Kim Velsey

When Aaron Hillis and his wife bought Cobble Hill's Video Free Brooklyn—a well-loved but somewhat dingy relic from the age of VHS—they had rather lofty plans for the store. They would transform the outmoded space into

A Little Nip-'N-Zuck!

FACEBOOK, SKYPE GIVE COSMETIC SURGERY INDUSTRY A LIFT

Time to update your profile?

By Jessica Roy

One day in 2008, while using the popular videochat service Skype, Tina Consorti had an uncomfortable realization. She didn't like how she looked on the little web screen. Her chin was sagging a bit, and shadowy wrinkles were forming like rings on a tree stump around her neck. It actually wasn't so bad in the mirror—she checked—but on Skype and other social media services, the flaws seemed amplified.

"I felt like I had a double chin," Ms. Consorti told *The Observer*. "Going on Skype or FaceTime you definitely see it—it looks twice as big as it normally is. I just wanted a nice clean look when I'm conversing with someone on Skype."

Three years ago, when she began getting into online ser-

vices (Tango is another favorite), Ms. Consorti had a "Lifestyle Lift," a minimally invasive facelift that is performed using local anesthesia. The procedure was carried out by Dr. Adam Schaffner, a renowned New York plastic surgeon with a burst of curls atop his head, who injects lips, neatens noses and chisels chins for a living. Over the last year, he told *The Observer*, his practice has seen a big uptick in facial surgeries, due in large part to the ubiquitous nature of digital photos posted to Facebook and similar sites.

Social media has made self-presentation a blood sport. Facebook photos are proliferating, along with Twitter avatars, YouTube videos and LinkedIn pics (and let's not even get into amateur porn). We're showing more of our-

selves to more of everyone else than ever before—with the accompanying increase in mortifying self-consciousness one might expect.

"With a good degree of frequency, people will come in and say, 'I saw myself in the mirror, but I didn't really notice it until I saw myself on Facebook or on my iPhone or iPad,'" Dr. Schaffner told us from his spa-like Midtown East office. "When you look in the mirror you're seeing the mirror image of yourself. But when you see yourself on social media, you're seeing yourself the way the world sees you."

Dr. Schaffner is not alone in his observations. "I would say maybe 80 percent of the time patients whip out a photo of themselves on an iPhone and say, 'See this? This is what I'm



Montag.

talking about—you can see it at this angle, when I turn my face like this," said Dr. Yael Halaas, another New York plastic surgeon. And back in February, a Virginia-based doctor named

Dr. Robert K. Sigal instigated a brief Internet fracas by publishing a press release about a new surgery he had developed called the "FaceTime Facelift" in response to the popularity

of the iPhone video-chatting app FaceTime. In the release, Dr. Sigal claimed that the procedure addresses issues of

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A Little Nip-'n-Zuck!

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"heaviness, fullness and sagging of the face and neck" emphasized by "the angle at which the phone is held, with the caller looking downward into the camera."

Those awkwardly angled camera phones can be brutal. But that is where a scalpel can come in handy. Chin augmentation procedures, which increased 71 percent between 2010 and 2011, are generally aimed at carving out a sharper jawline to better balance the facial features, creating a cleaner profile for Facebook photos. Rhinoplasty can straighten a nose that appears crooked when holding an iPhone at arm's length for a FaceTime session. Unintentionally wrinkles, ever more notice-

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able with HD, can be treated with Botox. Facial laxity is tightened with a few incisions behind the ears, and thin lips are puffed up by fillers.

Though social media platforms are frequently lambasted as fertile vehicles for narcissism, they've also been known to amplify our insecurities. That self-doubt has sold a lot of copies of Photoshop, the image-editing program long ubiquitous among professionals at glossy magazines and ad agencies that has become increasingly popular among home users. But Photoshop might not be enough. The proliferation of high-definition cameras and devices has turned our imperfections into gaping wounds of social unease, and you still can't fix a video without placing a call to an effects house.

On-air talent has been grappling with the HD problem for a while now. In 2005, *The New York Times* quoted a TV personality who approached her plastic surgeon with concerns about what the new format would do to her appearance. "On normal TV, she said, you can't see her few tiny wrinkles," the story noted. "In high-def, they stand out like folds of origami."

But now, it's not just newscasters and celebrities who are tossed into the ring to battle with the pixels: it's normal folks like you and me. With our lives increasingly broadcast to the public, everyone's a star, but not everyone can afford the makeup artist a star requires. In March of this year, Apple unveiled a new iPad with a Retina-display that boasts 264 pixels per inch, more than the human eye is even physically capable of taking in. The sleek tablet will be beautiful to watch movies on, but double chins are bound to quadruple with a screen like that.

For Dr. Schaffner's patients, Photoshop isn't doing the trick. And they're not alone. According to the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery, cosmetic procedures increased 82 percent between 1997 and 2011. A report published in February by the American Society of Plastic Surgeons found that cosmetic surgeries were up 2 percent year-over-year in 2011, despite the floundering economy, with a 5 percent rise in facelifts and a 71 percent increase in chin augmentations, the two most Facebook-friendly surgeries.

The tight job market may also be playing a role. Given services like Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn, honing an appealing online persona is increasingly seen as a prerequisite for gainful employment in many fields. And increasingly, it's not clear where our online representations stop and our own selves begin. Your online persona is part of your personal brand, the theory goes, so a nip and tuck is really just a necessary capital improvement.

"Plastic surgery isn't necessary, but I can see their thinking," said Erik Deckers, author of the book *Branding Yourself: How to Use Social Media to Invent or Reinvent Yourself*. "I



A new wrinkle in self-branding.

think a good picture is important in developing your brand. We want to project the very best image we can. Ultimately, social media has become our résumé. But if you've got something on the photo that you don't want showing up, Photoshop is still much cheaper than plastic surgery.

"I'd like to think that it's not that important," he added, "that we don't judge people based only on their appearance but rather that social media gives us a chance to look at people as a whole: what are their thoughts, interests—we can find all that. If that's all being killed because of a photo, then maybe that's the kind of person you don't want to be associated with."

AT 60, MS. CONSORTI fits the profile of the typical cosmetic surgery seeker—but according to Dr. David Schafer, another New York plastic surgeon, the patients who cite social media as a motivation for a change tend to fall into a

younger demo.

"A lot of people come in and say they keep seeing photos of themselves and they don't like the way their chins look," he said. "It's become a more common thing over the last year. The typical patients are women between the ages of 20 and 35, but we also have men, probably in the same age range. One of my clients is a designer and people take pictures of him for runway shows so he noticed it more."

Dr. Schaffner resisted the notion that such patients are insecure. "I think the people who come asking for this are people who are in tune with the way they look and care about their appearance," he said. "They are often wanting to advance professionally, or are concerned about the way they look to significant others."

Teenagers, Dr. Schaffner said, also show up to his practice with concerns about their online profiles. "Teenagers use social media much more

than adults do in many cases, and oftentimes they're noticing things," he admitted.

"I try to operate on minors only when absolutely necessary," he added. "Short of trauma or cancer operations or things of that nature, generally we would wait until maturity from a physical perspective and then generally proceed with any plastic surgery they might want."

Dr. Schaffner was asked if he'd go under the knife for a cosmetic procedure himself. He wasn't planning on it. "I'm happy with the way I look."

Of course, we weren't here to talk about him. *The Observer* produced a photo of ourselves taken with our Smartphone. We asked the doctor to suggest a few options.

"Well, what concerns you?" he asked.

"Sometimes at certain angles there's a double chin," we offered.

He nodded vigorously. "Double chins are very common and there are several ways to ad-

dress them." A chin augmentation or neck lift could help, but the easiest way would be liposuction. Dr. Schaffner could make a tiny incision beneath our chin, he said, and liposuction the area to further define the jaw. The cost would start at \$2,000, not bad for a flawless Facebook photo.

Of course, if we're aiming for perfection, we might as well shell out for chin augmentation, too. (If it's good enough for Bristol Palin, it's good enough for us.) Our lips, heart-shaped and pencil thin, would look weird framed by a stronger chin. But fillers could fix that. And hell, why not throw in a mini facelift like Ms. Consorti's, which could take care of any slack still lurking around our cheek region?

We're starting to see how Heidi Montag, the famously cosmetically altered *Hills* star and Barbie-doll blonde, assembled those 1.3 million Twitter followers of hers.

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