

# The thriving business of looking good on Zoom

## More Zooms, more cosmetic surgeries

- In a 2021 [online survey](#) of 335 people who'd used videoconference technology, over **40%** of respondents reported noticing a new aspect of their appearance that they disliked due to their use of video calls.
- Rhinoplasties [saw a 37% increase](#) in business at the start of the pandemic.
- In a [survey](#) of more than 100 board-certified dermatologists from across the country, more than **50%** indicated a relative increase in cosmetic consultations within their practices despite the state of the pandemic.

And about **86%** of those dermatologists reported their patients were referencing video-conferencing as a reason for their new cosmetic concerns. (The technical term for when someone perceives they're unattractive after seeing themselves on a video call is "face dysmorphia.")

[Dr. Carolyn Chang](#), a San Francisco based plastic surgeon, witnessed this rise in consultations as the pandemic began.

[Chang](#) told me that Zoom showed people different angles they weren't seeing before. She likened a *pre-Zoom* world similar to a changing room:

"You always subconsciously position yourself so that the clothing looks better. And so when people are looking at themselves in a mirror, they'll raise their eyebrows, relax their mouth, move their neck — basically always seeing their best angles."

But what Zoom did is show them what's really there — it was a quicker identification of problems that led many to consider plastic surgery. [Chang's](#) most popular procedures for such clients are the lower face and neck lift, and the upper lids. That's what people see in the self-view camera on Zoom — their eyes or their neck.

Her clients mainly include people in middle to older age — likely individuals that are leading teams at work and don't want to feel timed out. Others include people who have recently lost jobs and find it harder to get jobs because of their age. So what Zoom is doing is simply reinforcing how different they look to other people.

The theme of age kept coming up with both Golden and [Chang](#). And as I pressed further, I realized that it explained a lot of the questions I still had.

## A generational preference

San Francisco is the city where dress codes go to die. It's also where plenty of developers live (including yours truly), and most of them operate on a strict camera-off policy. As I'm about to end my interview with Golden, I ask her: "Do people, especially those in the tech industry, really care that much about how they look on a Zoom call? Because I certainly never considered it that important."

After a slight pause, she tells me that among Gen Zers, it's popular to hold an "I don't care" view of the world. Golden's own daughter sometimes even takes business calls from her bed.

But Golden tells me that while this might be OK between ourselves, it doesn't always work that way with other generations:

"The Gen Zs (and some millennials too) like to say 'I'm OK' because I'm modern, I'm cool, I get to do this. But everybody else looking down at them is a bit skeptical. Amongst yourselves you think you're cool, but what happens is that once people hit 30 years old, 40 years old, 50 years old...people have a coming to, and they think they should up their game...because I want to get that position up there."

Maybe someday I'll move that Muhammad Ali poster. Or buy an artificial plant. Others might invest in a custom video studio or even a surgically lifted neck.

What's undeniable is that the Zoom box has turned the personal public. It's become [another room in the house](#), and for many, investing in this new "room" makes perfect sense.

The box has also redefined the type of work many do. Golden used to only advise people on how they looked in the real world. Cepeda used to focus on filming audition tapes for budding actors. [Chang's](#) patients hadn't seen certain sides of themselves before Zoom. They've all played a part in shaping the Zoom economy.

This box has forever changed the way we communicate — except for one thing: looks still matter.

*Olivia Heller/The Hustle*