LESSON PLAN

Level:	Grades 7 to 9
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Duration:	1½-2 hours

Put Your Best Face Forward

This lesson is part of USE, UNDERSTAND & CREATE: A Digital Literacy Framework for Canadian Schools: http://mediasmarts.ca/teacher-resources/digital-literacy-framework.

Overview

In this lesson, students start by discussing the phenomenon of "selfies" and serve as experts in advising the teacher on the standards by which the "best" selfies are judged. They then discuss a number of statements taken from interviews with youth that highlight issues of self-representation, body image and gender standards, and learn about "photoshopping" images. Finally, students apply what they have learned by modifying an image that is at least 50 years old to meet "selfie" standards.

Learning Outcomes

Students will:

- reflect on their attitudes towards body image and gender
- understand the constructed nature of media images
- learn strategies for managing body image concerns
- create a media product

Preparation and Materials

- Arrange for access to:
    - a webcam, digital camera or camera phone
    - a computer and data projector or digital whiteboard
- Prepare to project the slideshow *Before and After*
- Photocopy the handouts *Selfies and Self-Representation* and *Selfie de Milo*
- Click here to download the *Before and After* slideshow.

Procedure

Selfie-Awareness

Begin by asking the class: "What is a selfie?" (A photograph of yourself posted online, usually to a social network such as Instagram or a messaging app such as Snapchat.) How many students have ever posted selfies? (Encourage students that it's OK to admit it – you may raise your hand here as well.)

Tell students that since they are the selfie experts, you'd like them to be your guides in how to take a good selfie. Set up a digital camera, camera phone or webcam to take a selfie of yourself or a student volunteer and ask the class to contribute tips on how to pose or position the camera to take a good selfie.

Make sure students understand that you're not asking for tips on how to manipulate the photo once it's been taken – just how to take a good initial photo. When students suggest tips, ask them to explain what that tip accomplishes.

You may prompt them with tips such as:

- Have a bright light on your face for the "overexposed" look (washes out lines, blemishes, etc.) Natural light is best but a strong incandescent light works too.
- Don't take the picture straight on – turn your head to the left or right slightly (to give more depth and highlight your cheekbones).
- Hold the camera above your face, so that you're looking up at it (makes your eyes look bigger, keeps your nostrils out of the shot and makes you look thinner).
- Have a simple background (focuses attention on you).

It's all right if some students disagree on some tips – some may feel that striking particular poses is a good idea, while others may find them cliché. In that case you can either take a vote or take the picture twice and have students pick from the two pictures. When you have taken the photo, display it on the screen or the Smartboard.

Selfie-Representation

Distribute the handout *Selfies and Self-Representation* and have students read through it and note which of the statements they agree or disagree with. Go through the handout and lead a brief discussion about the first three statements, leading to a broader discussion about this question: How do people use social media to create an image of themselves that may be different from how they're seen offline?

Now have students discuss statements 4 to 6, leading to a broader discussion on these points:

- What makes a "good" photo for girls? What makes a "bad" photo?
- What makes a "good" photo for boys? How are the standards different for boys and girls, and why?
- Do you feel better or worse about yourself and your photos when you see other people's photos? Why or why not?

Have people always had the same ideas about what makes a man or a woman look good? What different "looks" have been ideal at different times? (If students have difficulty with this question, explain that physical ideals *have* changed tremendously over time. In the 1920s, women were expected to look thin and boyish; in the 1950s, broad-hipped and busty. Certain times and places have prized particular features as well, such as small feet or blackened teeth.)

Now have students discuss statements 7 and 8, leading to a broader discussion on these points:

- How are you "rewarded" for a good photo online? Are the rewards the same for boys as for girls?

- How are you "punished" for a bad one? Is it the same for boys as for girls?

- How does it feel to get a low rating or a negative comment? How does it feel to get a high rating or a positive comment?

- Do you feel like you always have to be "camera ready" in case someone takes your picture? Why or why not?

- How much of the "reward" and "punishment" for good or bad photos comes from other kids, and how much comes from yourself?

- What are the drawbacks of not posting photos of yourself at all? Are they the same for boys as for girls?

Filters and Photoshop

Now ask students what the term "Photoshop" means. Explain that it originally referred to a specific photo-manipulation program but now refers more generally to the act of editing photos, particularly in order to make people look better.

Show students the slideshow *Before and After* and then have students discuss statement 10, leading to a broader discussion on these questions:

- When you see models (male or female) in magazines, do you think about how they might have been photoshopped? Why or why not?

- Does it change how you see them if you *know* they've been photoshopped (for example, if you see an unretouched version of the same photo)?

- When you see your friends' photos, do you think about how *they* might have been photoshopped or otherwise manipulated? Does it change how you feel about your own photos?

Assessment and Evaluation: Selfie de Milo

Ask students what apps or services they or their friends use to manipulate selfies after they've been taken. Make a list of students' suggestions on the board and briefly note what each one is most useful for (some are good for adding filters, for example, while others specialize in removing blemishes.) Make sure to include a few that work with uploaded photos as well as camera phones: if students don't name any you can suggest http://www.ribbet.com/ and http://www.phixr.com/photo/. (These are only suggestions and do not constitute an endorsement by MediaSmarts of either service.)

Distribute the handout *Selfie de Milo* and explain the assignment to students: they are to find a photo or other image at least 50 years old (possible sources are provided on the assignment sheet) and manipulate it, using the tools and

techniques of their choice, to fit the "selfie aesthetic." Students then annotate the final image to show why and how they manipulated it.

Optional: Have your students upload their photos with the hashtag #selfiedemilo . Then search that hashtag using a search engine such as Google (put it in quotation marks for best results) and, once you have reviewed the search to weed out any possibly inappropriate images, share the results of the search with the class.

Selfies and Self-Representation

All of the quotes below are from teens or young adults who were interviewed about their experiences with social networking and the Internet.

Read through them and note whether you agree or disagree. Be ready to explain your position in class discussion.

1. Kids try to seem better online and happier, and just post everything like that. Some kids try to make them look like everyone's their friend or that their boyfriend's the greatest, but in reality, they're not.

    Agree   **Disagree**

2. There's some people that have different personalities online. They create accounts and they're just on YouTube and they become this character which is not them, and it gives them the chance to become somebody else, someone they wish they could be.

    Agree   **Disagree**

3. I don't really get embarrassed by putting like pictures of me making a funny face or something but I would never put that as my profile picture.

    Agree   **Disagree**

4. If a guy has his shirt off in his photo, people will say he's good looking -- but if he's fat, he'll be called fat.

    Agree   **Disagree**

5. Girls kind of feel pressured to be on lots of social media sites and post pictures of themselves, and then if they're getting a lot of guy followers they'll feel pressures to like cater their pictures or the style of their picture more towards the guy followers.

    Agree   **Disagree**

6. Guys can get away with bloody murder compared to girls in social networking. Because, like, no one expects a guy to care, you know what I mean? But they expect a girl to care, so if a girl doesn't care, they just assume that she's doing it purposely.

    Agree   **Disagree**

7. You look at the picture and you're like "Why won't people like this?" and then you look at it and you think "Yeah, my hair doesn't look that good," or "My clothes don't look that good," or "Wow, that outfit actually wasn't that nice." You start to look at everything and then you make yourself feel more negative about it.

    Agree   **Disagree**

8. Sometimes it's really embarrassing, if you're making, like, the stupidest face in a picture and your friend posts it on Facebook, that's gonna start some drama if they won't take it down or people have already seen it.

    Agree   **Disagree**

9. It makes me more comfortable when my profile picture is something that looks flawless and 'pretty' even though I know it's fake.

   Agree   **Disagree**

10. We know pictures in ads are Photoshopped, but we still want to look like that.

    Agree   **Disagree**

Selfie de Milo

For this assignment, you will find a photo or other image (painting, sculpture, etc) that is **at least fifty years old** and transform it to fit the "selfie look" we've discussed in class.

Steps

1. Select an image. The original image must be a portrait of a human person. Here is a list of places you can find old photos and art:

    *   https://www.flickr.com/photos/britishlibrary

    *   http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/dag/

    *   http://www.historicalstockphotos.com/

    *   http://www.digitalvaults.org/

    *   http://www.bbc.co.uk/arts/yourpaintings/paintings/search/belongs_to/national-portrait-gallery-london-2098

    *   http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/portrait-portal/Pages/portrait-portal.aspx

2. **Manipulate** your image to fit the "selfie look" we've discussed in class. Here are some ways you can do this:

    *   take a camera photo of it and apply filter apps

    *   upload it to an online photo manipulation tool

    *   download it to your home or school computer and use photo manipulation software

    *   print it and manipulate the image physically

    *   draw a freehand version of the "altered" photo

    You are not being graded on your art skills, but on your thinking and your understanding of the issues discussed in class.

3. **Annotate** your final image by identifying the ways in which you altered the original image and explaining why you chose to make those changes.
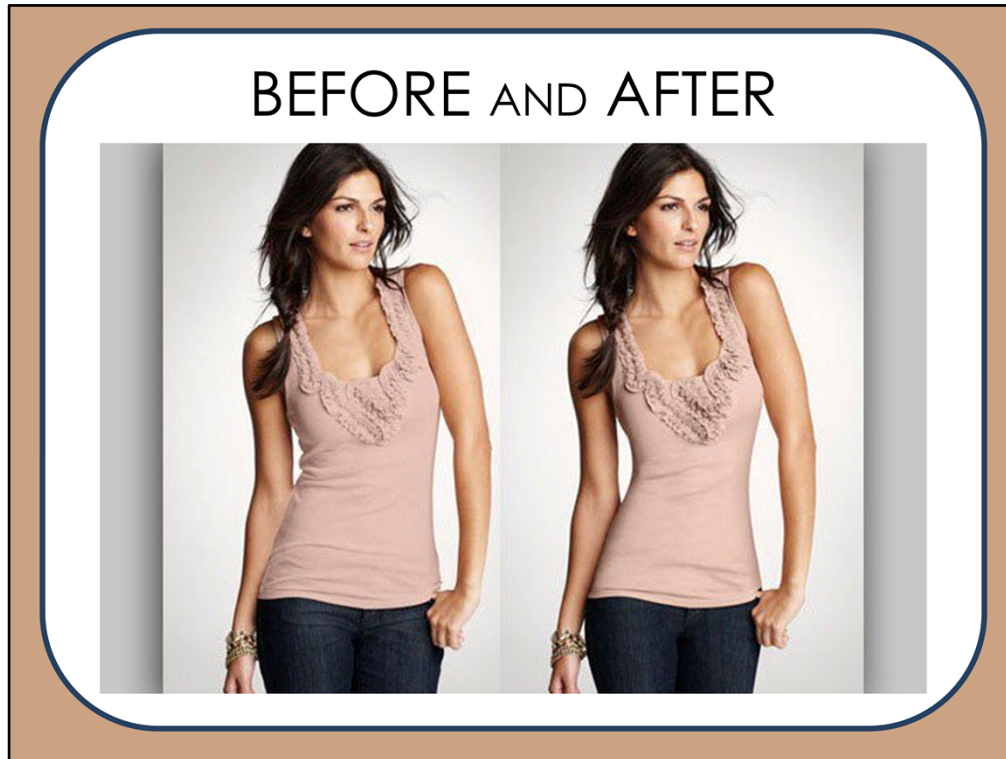
Photo manipulation, once the preserve of a small number of airbrush-equipped artists, has become commonplace in the fashion, publishing and advertising industries thanks to the introduction of photo-editing software such as Photoshop.

Photos may be retouched for any number of reasons – to make models thinner, or bustier, or to change skin tone.

Retouching photos in this way raises a number of concerns. One is that the already unrealistic bodies youth are exposed to are made literally impossible – models frequently have collarbones, ribs and even hips erased to make them look thinner – guaranteeing that even those who meet media standards of attractiveness will still be left feeling inadequate.

The models themselves may not know how their photos are going to be manipulated, and sometimes object when they see the final result.

Men's photos are frequently retouched as well, but research has found that boys' self-image is affected by seeing unrealistic images of men *or* women.

University student Anna Hill created this mock ad as part of a photography class. She later said that the process made her feel more critical of how she looked in her original photos, even though she had taken and manipulated them herself.
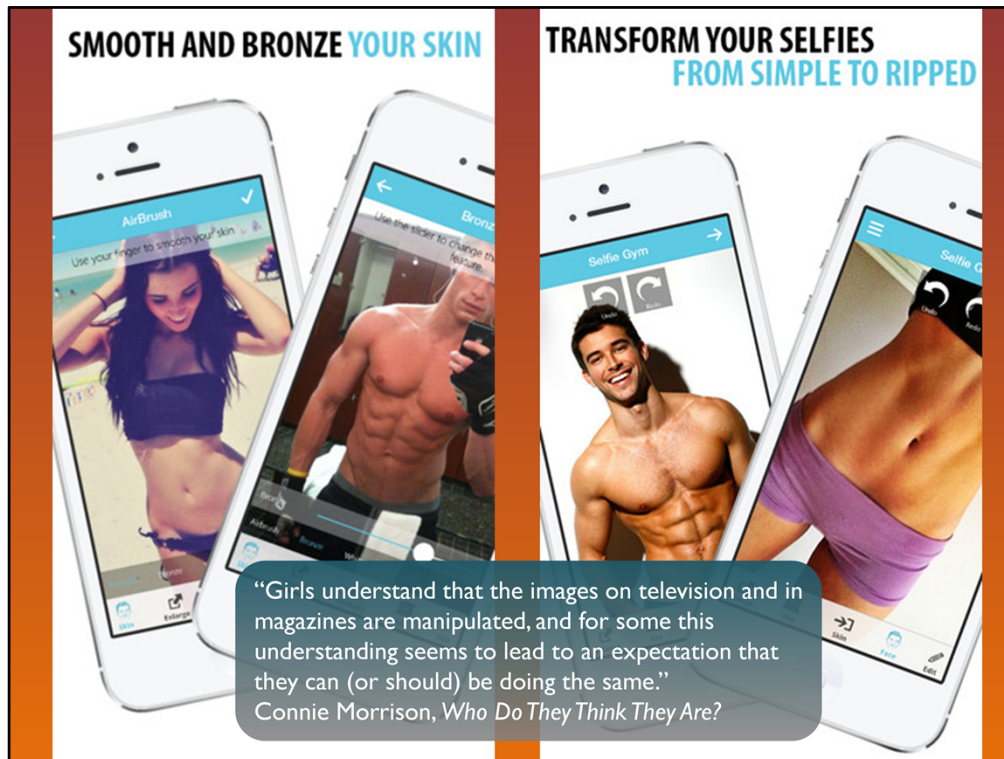
"Wanna know my secret? … I swapped my bather bottoms to black (cause they're a size bigger & black is slimming), Smothered on some fake tan, clipped in my hair extensions, stood up a bit taller, sucked in my guts, popped my hip- threw in a skinny arm, stood a bit wider, pulled my shoulders back and added a bit of a cheeky/I' m so proud of my results smile. Zoomed in on the before pic- zoomed out on the after & added a filter…

What's my point? Don't be deceived by what you see in magazines & on Instagram. You never see the dozens of other pics they took that weren't as flattering."

As we've seen, lots of kids are experts at copying the "Photoshop look" just using things like poses, light and camera angle and position.

SMOOTH AND BRONZE YOUR SKIN

TRANSFORM YOUR SELFIES
FROM SIMPLE TO RIPPED

"Girls understand that the images on television and in magazines are manipulated, and for some this understanding seems to lead to an expectation that they can (or should) be doing the same."
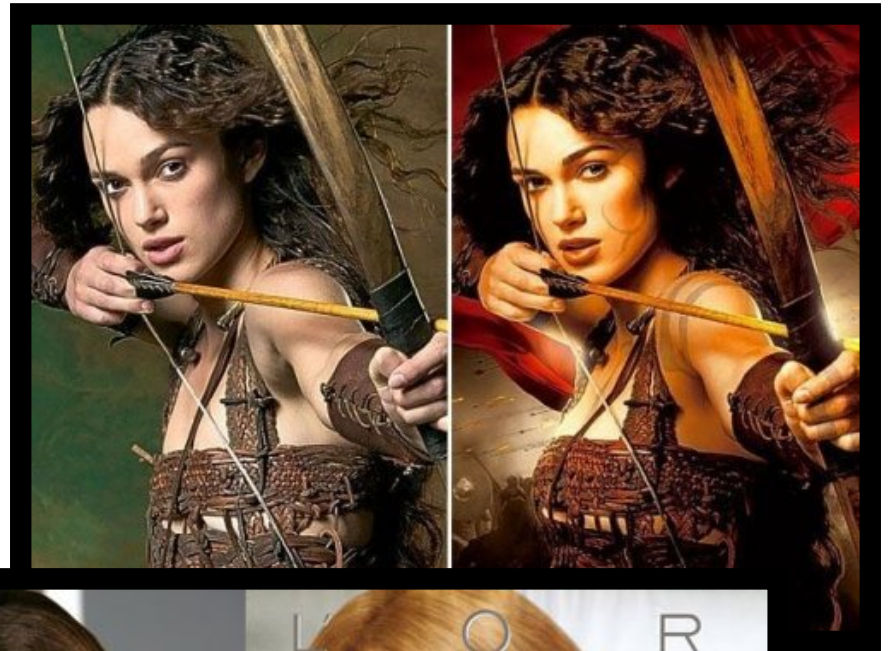Connie Morrison, *Who Do They Think They Are?*

But apps like this one offer kids the chance to step beyond that and actually manipulate their pictures digitally. Unfortunately, this sometimes means that as well as comparing ourselves to artificially perfect images of celebrities, we compare ourselves to artificially perfect images of our friends – even when we *know* what they really look like.
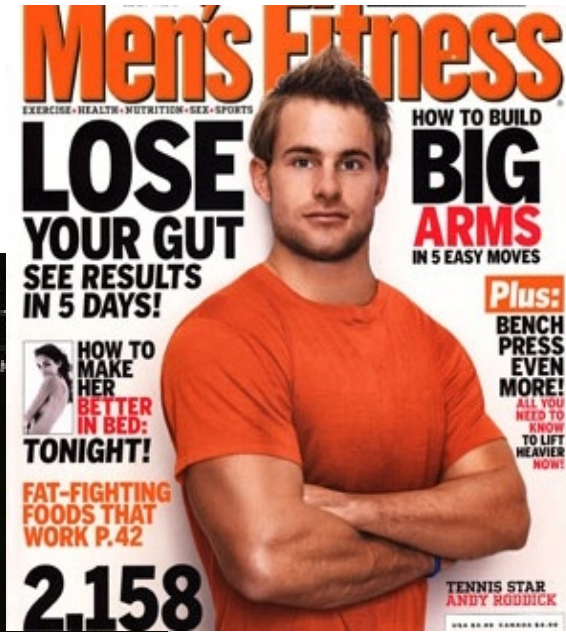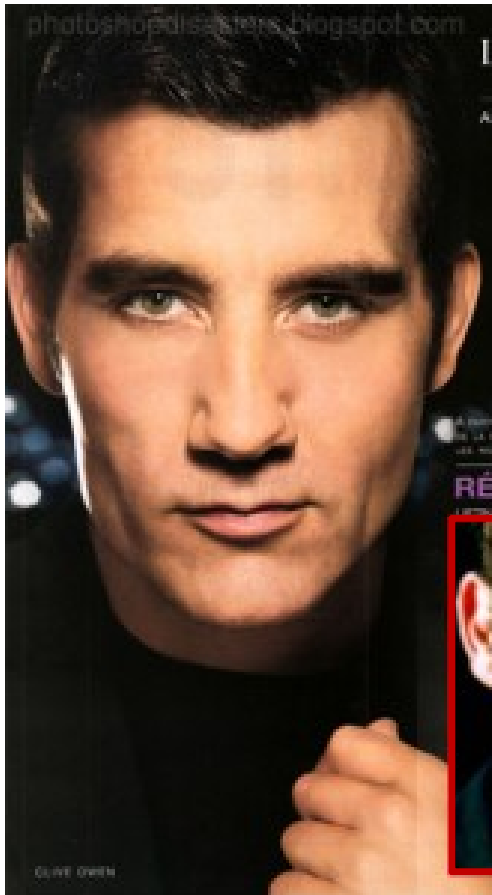
BEFORE AND AFTER

"The retouching is excessive. I do not look like that and more importantly I don't desire to look like that.

I actually have a Polaroid that the photographer gave me on the day of the shoot… I can tell you they've reduced the size of my legs by about a third. For my money it looks pretty good the way it was taken."

THIS KIT ACTS AS:

- eyeliner
- eyeshadow
- mascara
- eyebrow filler
- eye whitener
- colored contacts
- lipstick
- concealer
- foundation
- skin contouring
- pore minimizer
- hair dye
- plastic surgery
  › eye enlarger
  › nose job
  › face-lift

"When I suddenly went back to the unedited layer, it looked so wrong and kinda gross. It made me extra aware of how skewed my perception was after looking at the edited ones for a while."

IMMORTALIZE YOUR BEAUTY

no one will ever know...
as long as you never
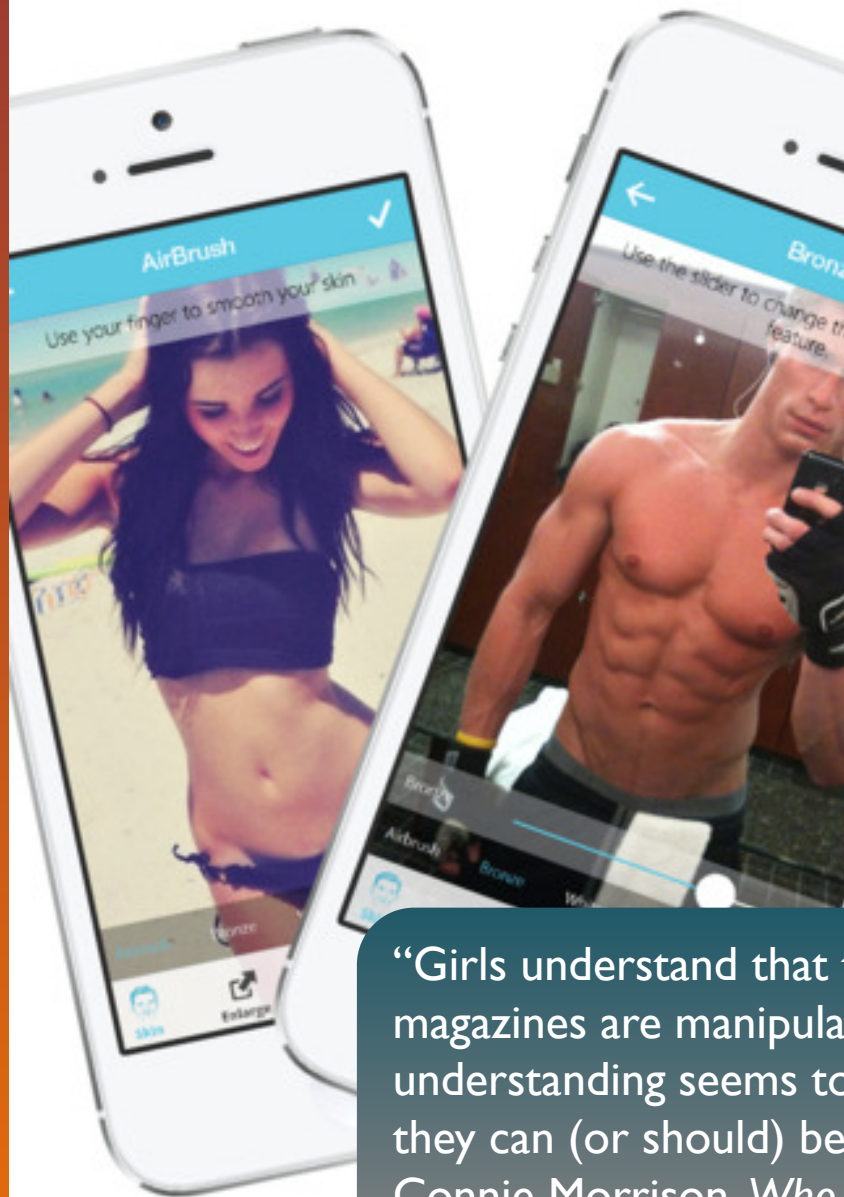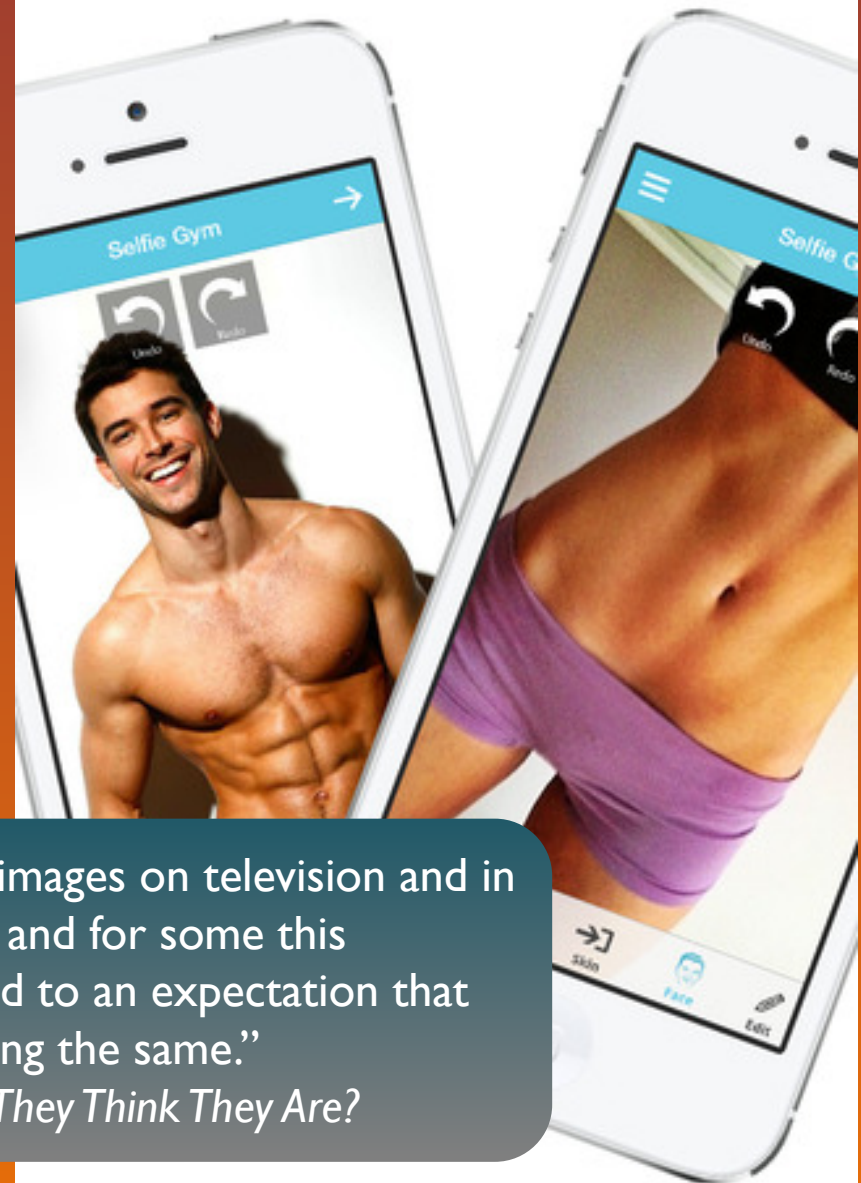let anyone see you in
person again.

ALL-IN-ONE BEAUTY

by photoshop

"Wanna know my secret? … I swapped my bather bottoms to black (cause they're a size bigger & black is slimming), Smothered on some fake tan, clipped in my hair extensions, stood up a bit taller, sucked in my guts, popped my hip- threw in a skinny arm, stood a bit wider, pulled my shoulders back and added a bit of a cheeky/I' m so proud of my results smile. Zoomed in on the before pic- zoomed out on the after & added a filter…

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TRANSFORM YOUR SELFIES
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Connie Morrison, *Who Do They Think They Are?*

Assessment Task: "Selfie de Milo"

	Learning Expectations	*Achievement*
Use Skills and competencies that fall under "use" range from basic technical know-how – using computer programs such as word processors, web browsers, email, and other communication tools – to the more sophisticated abilities for accessing and using knowledge resources, such as search engines and online databases, and emerging technologies such as cloud computing.	experience texts from a variety of genres and cultural traditions; discuss likes and dislikes for a variety of texts assesses and reduces/avoids technology related threats to his/her health selects and uses digital tools effectively and productively	Insufficient (R); Beginning (1); Developing (2); Competent (3) Confident (4)
Understand Understand includes recognizing how networked technology affects our behaviour and our perceptions, beliefs and feelings about the world around us. Understand also prepares us for a knowledge economy as we develop information management skills for finding, evaluating and effectively using information to communicate, collaborate and solve problems.	is aware of the gender stereotypes that exist in video games, virtual worlds and elsewhere on the Internet demonstrate understanding of the social nature of digital media and technologies explain why different audiences might have different responses to a variety of media texts identify language and visual images that create mood and evoke emotion in a variety of oral, print and other media texts and the rights he/she has as a creator explain how a variety of media texts address their intended purpose and audience interpret increasingly complex media texts, using overt and implied messages as evidence for their interpretations explain how individual elements of various media forms combine to create, reinforce and/or enhance meaning identify the conventions and techniques used in some familiar media forms and explain how they help convey meaning and influence or engage the audience	Insufficient (R); Beginning (1); Developing (2); Competent (3) Confident (4)

	Learning Expectations	*Achievement*
Create Create is the ability to produce content and effectively communicate through a variety of digital media tools. It includes being able to adapt what we produce for various contexts and audiences; to create and communicate using rich media such as images, video and sound; and to effectively and responsibly engage with user-generated content such as blogs and discussion forums, video and photo sharing, social gaming and other forms of social media. The ability to create using digital media ensures that Canadians are active contributors to digital society.	use own experiences as a basis for exploring and expressing opinions and learning apply existing knowledge to generate new ideas, products or processes using digital technology communicate ideas and information in a variety of oral, print and other media texts, such as short reports, talks and posters create original digital works as a means of personal or group expression describe in detail the topic, purpose, and audience for media texts they plan to create identify conventions and techniques appropriate to the form chosen for a media text they plan to create	Insufficient (R); Beginning (1); Developing (2); Competent (3) Confident (4)