

Fall 12-4-2017

Viewing Snapchat Filters Through a Sociological Lens

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Recommended Citation

Nguyen, Mymy, "Viewing Snapchat Filters Through a Sociological Lens" (2017). *Gender & Sexuality Studies Student Work Collection*. 14.
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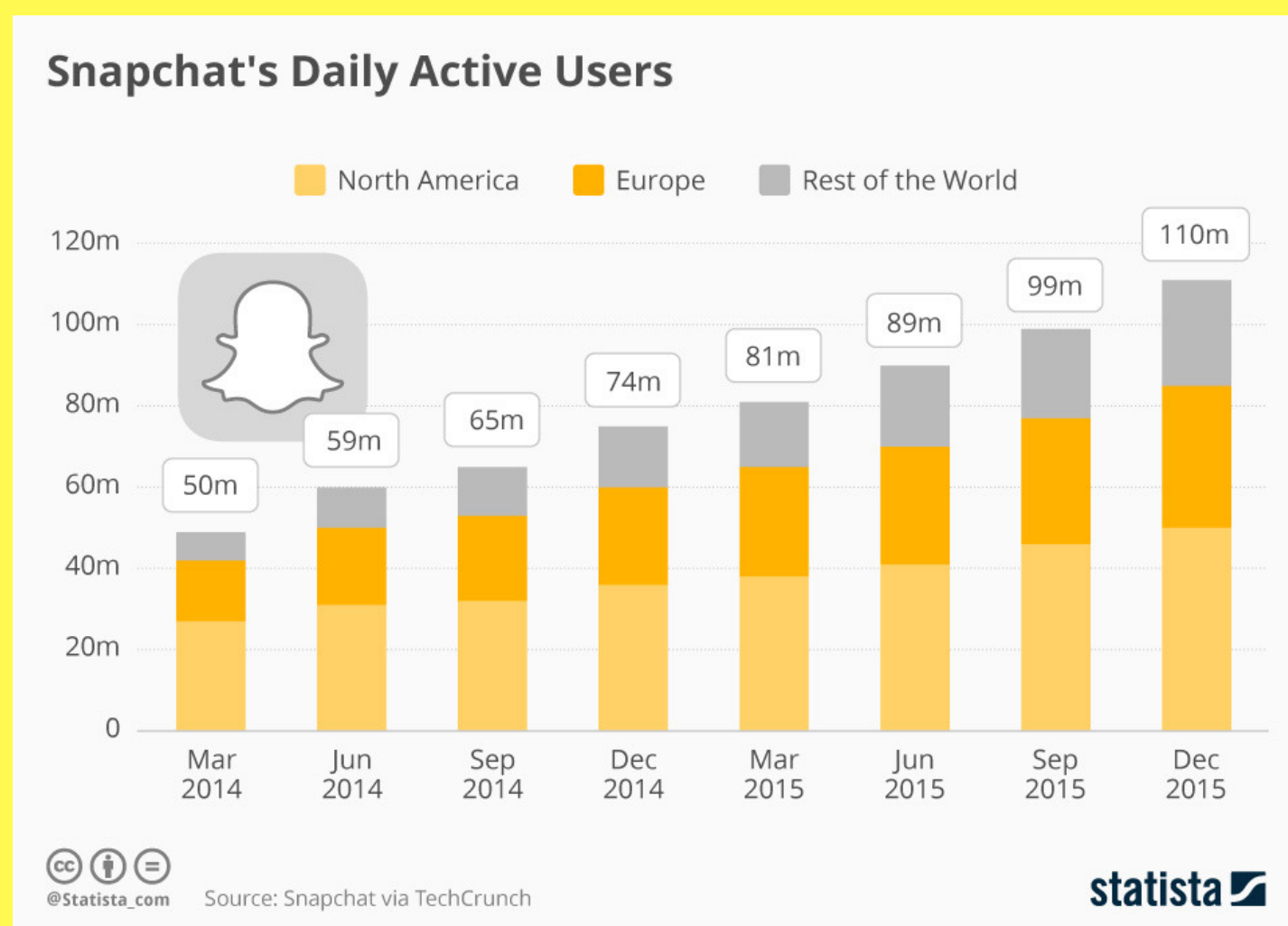
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HOW IT REALLY AFFECTS THE WORLD

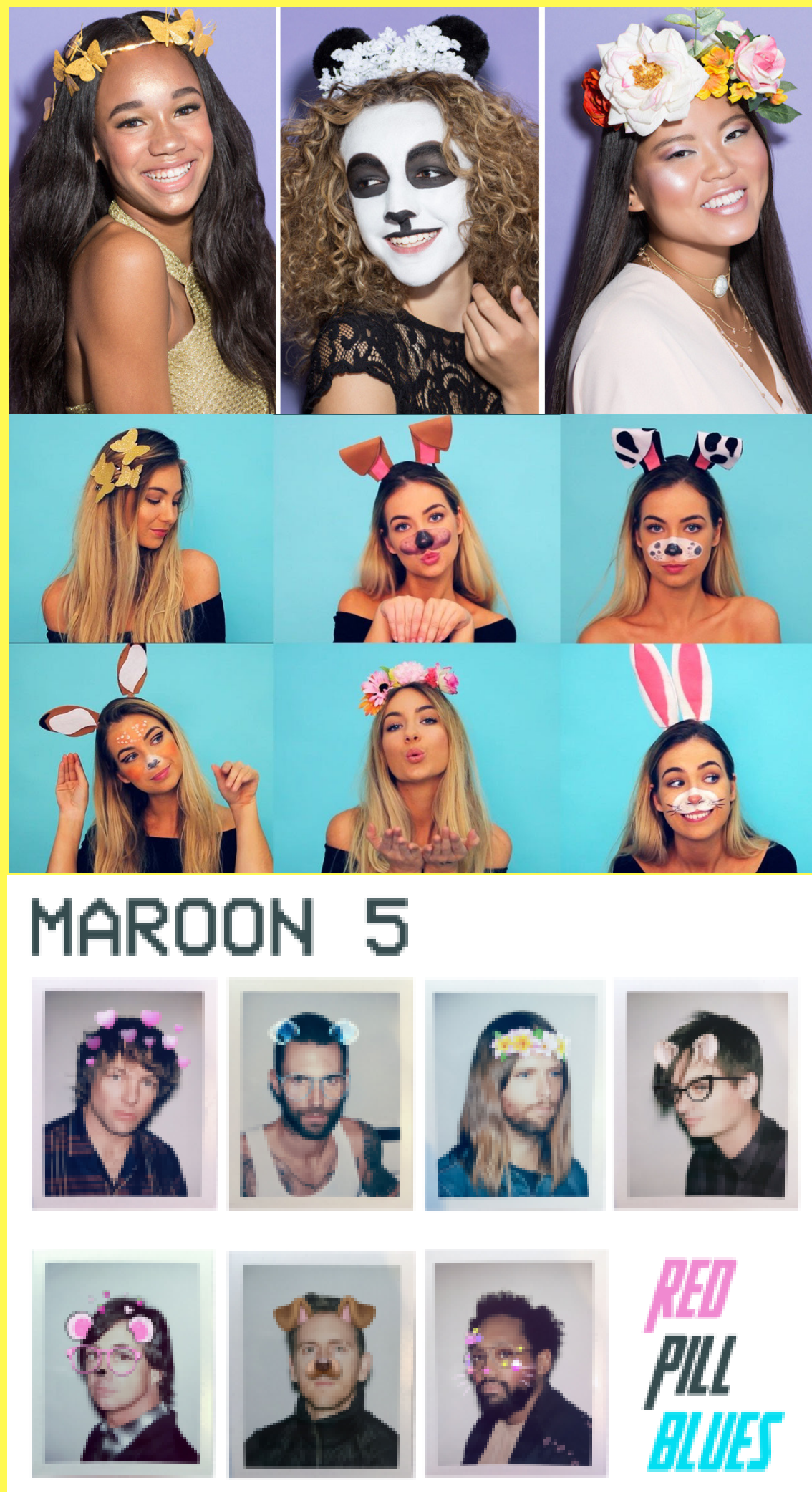
SNAPCHAT FILTERS

BY MYMY NGUYEN



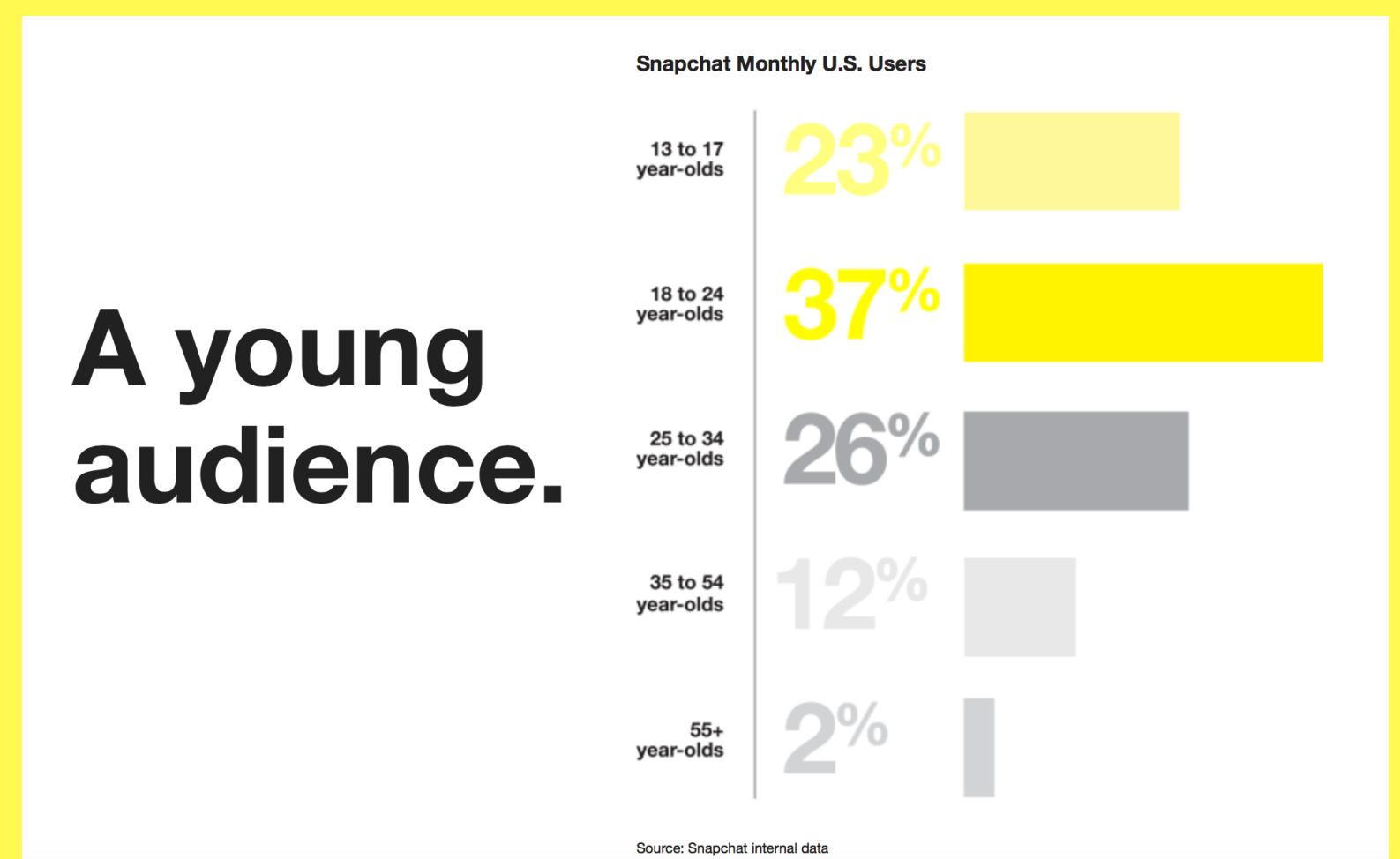
With the target audience starting at the age of 13, there is no doubt Snapchat and its filters will have a lasting effect on these young teenagers.

“Nowadays, Snapchat is no longer just a social media. It's a social 'needia'” (Myers, 2015).



Snapchat has taken over the world. In just over one year, the amount of daily active users increased from 50 million to 110 million people. Its impact has only grown over the past few years.

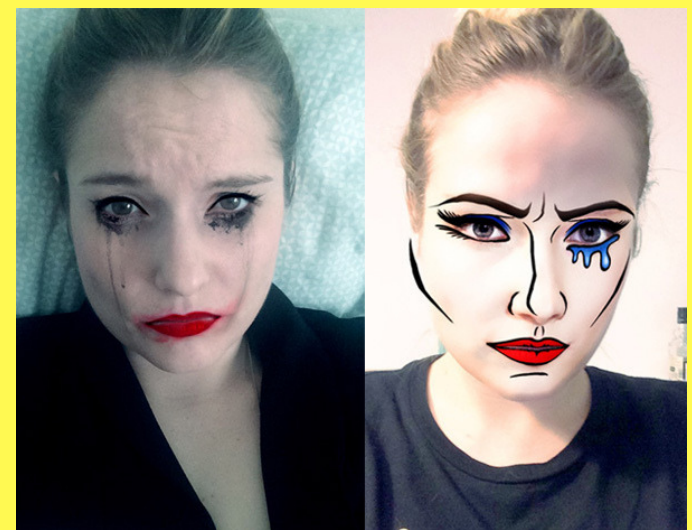
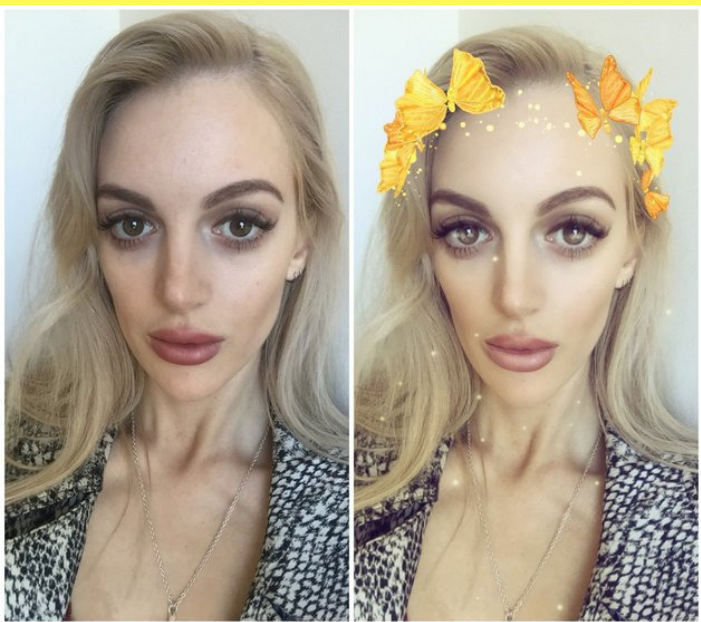
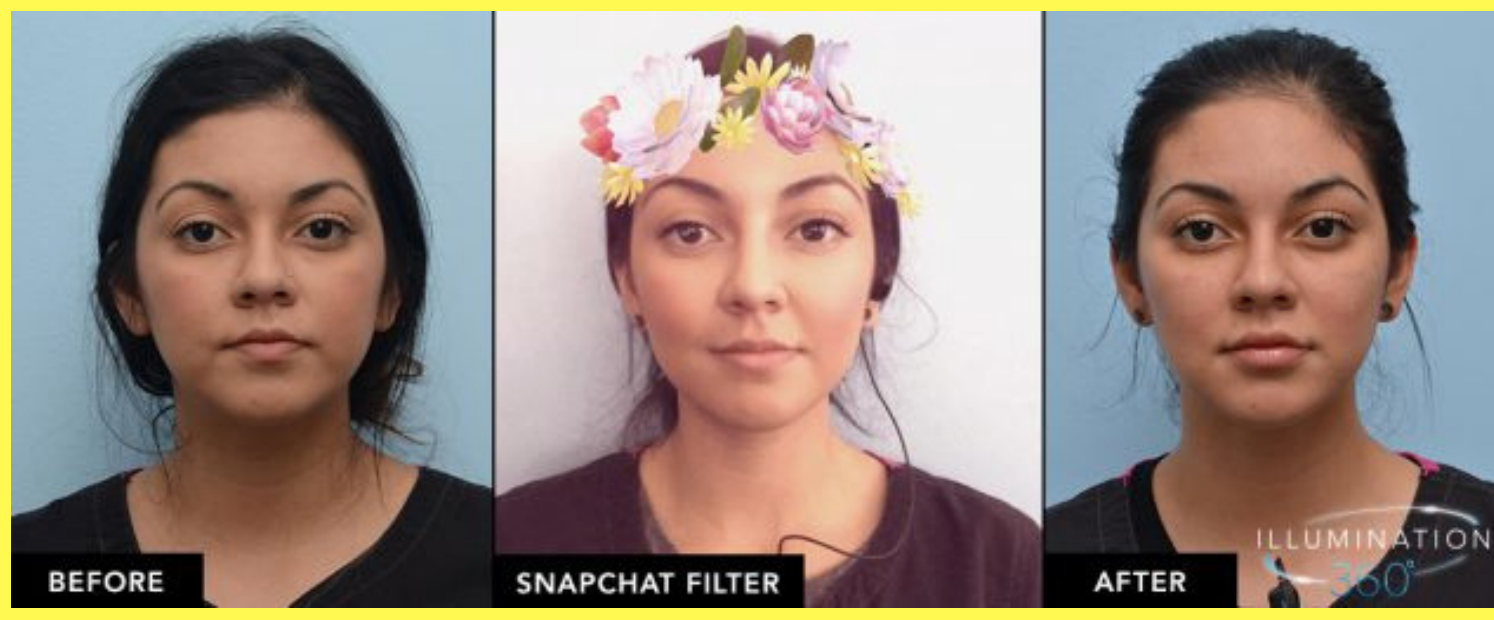
“Snapchat still consists of a (quite) young audience, with 60% of its US users being aged between 13-24 years old” (Litsa, 2016).



Snapchat filters have become a big part of our culture, whether you believe it or not. These filters have come alive through Halloween costumes (left). That's right, people actually dress up as Snapchat filters. What would make someone want to be a Snapchat filter, you ask? This idea of "dress up" shows our personal interests and desires. When we look at these filters, we are usually drawn to the way that it makes us look like a "cuter" or "sexier" version of ourselves.

Celebrities have promoted the use of these Snapchat filters when they post their own filtered pictures. Their fans feel a stronger connection when they realize that their idols can use the same face filters that they do too. People often want what celebrities have or are promoting, because they want to be like that person. In this case, people use Snapchat because they can connect with celebrities and see what they are up to. But they don't realize what messages these filters are really sending to their audience. Maroon 5 (left) used Snapchat filters on their album cover, and they explained why:

“...We're kind of seeing things through these different filters, and we're presenting these different versions of ourself to the world through social media.”



What kind of messages are Snapchat filters sending? Many of these filters are called "beauty filters," which means they can make you look absolutely flawless. The top left picture shows us the before and after of the "pretty filter." The after picture made her nose slimmer, her skin looking airbrushed, her cheeks sucked in, and her face a rosier color. In the second left and right picture, the after part shows us that it made their skin lighter, their faces more contoured, and both the eyes & lips a lighter color. In the top middle picture, these women now have bigger lips, smaller nose, and bigger eyes. They are not pictured here, but there are a lot of other filters that whiten our teeth, give us longer lashes, change our eye colors, and even put a full face of makeup on us. These filters alter our faces so that we can look closer to "perfect," according to society's standards. These filters tell users that you should change your appearance to become more attractive. It lowers our self-esteem and makes us feel like we have to put filters on our faces to look decent. Snapchat filters have such a big impact on our perception of beauty, that people have actually gotten work done to look like their filtered pictures (top right)! A cosmetic surgeon started what is called "the Snapchat challenge," where they alter a patient's face to look like their desired Snapchat photo. Their ad for this procedure is:

"Snapchat filters can make you look great in pictures, however, those Snapchats disappear. If you want results that last, consider dermal fillers and the Illumination 360 approach. #nofilter"
(Mabrie, 2017).



In the third and fourth pictures on both sides, we can see that negative emotions are portrayed in a humorous way. Are Snapchat filters telling us that crying and being sad is somehow funny and should be mocked? Being "perfect" is not having any negative emotions, just positive ones. Why is it that in the third left picture there are filters of a face with makeup on, mascara running, and tears pouring down? Showing this emotion is considered "weak," and because women are seen as the "weak" ones (while men are the strong ones), it becomes a joke. These filters are made to be funny, while others appear to be cute or sexy, because it reinforces the idea that women should always look good in order to be treated respectfully. When you look attractive, people like you more and will want to be associated with you. When you show emotions and prove that you are not "perfect," people might laugh at you or try to keep a distance because they're not sure how to "handle" you.

"THE HOE FILTER"



Yes, we have somehow turned a cute innocent dog filter into a "hoe filter." Females are shamed for using this filter, and are called insulting names. Apparently someone "decided to link a dynamic image overlay of a cute dog with its tongue sticking out to promiscuity and 'sluttiness'" (Hathaway, 2016). This Snapchat filter became a stereotype for all women who use it. Oh, but if guys use it then it's totally cute! This stereotype is linked to shaming women for having sex and teaching them that it's bad, while men are praised for their "sexual conquests" and are taught to just not get a girl pregnant.

"Some of the first to call attention to women's usage of the dog face were men who sought to shame them for it, branding the dog face 'the hoe filter.' The nickname stuck, the misogyny was normalized, and a meme was born" (Hathaway, 2016).



What does the stereotypical "nerd" look like? Well, according to society and this Snapchat filter, it's having big glasses, braces, and big, chubby, pink cheeks that have a little resemblance to acne. Users who actually wear glasses, have braces, and acne may feel embarrassed when they see their friends posting with this filter and making jokes about it. Snapchat doesn't even have to label this "the nerd filter," people already do it for them.



"THE NERD FILTER"



"THE ANIME INSPIRED FILTER"



Honestly, how did no one in the company say "Yeah, I don't think this is a good idea." This filter exaggerates all of the stereotypes for Asians. The squinting and smiling eyes, slanted eyebrows, blushing cheeks, and buck teeth are all associated with Asian people. What's even worse is that Snapchat's inspiration for this filter was anime, Japanese animation. This offensive filter could be used on anyone, giving people the opportunity to make plenty of racist jokes.



"THE CUTE FILTERS"

Most "cute" filters include long lashes, eyeliner, and even lipstick, which are most of the animal filters on Snapchat. This says two things: "cute" is associated with only females, and women are often associated with animals. Notice how "cute" is when women have makeup on? Once again, it reinforces the norm about females wearing makeup to "look presentable." These animal filters have an underlying meaning that portray females as not only "cute" and "exotic," but also how women are treated like animals at times (catcalling, not treated fairly, used to entertain others, etc.)

