

56% of Americans Say Smile Insecurity Affects Their Confidence, Study Finds

Nearly two-thirds say improving their smile would increase their everyday confidence, while 44% say smile insecurity has held them back professionally.

NASHVILLE, TN, UNITED STATES, August 3, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- For millions of Americans, smiling no longer feels automatic. Photos, video calls, dating apps, and social media posts have created more opportunities for people to analyze their teeth, expressions, and appearance — and many are responding by changing or concealing their natural smile.



SmileSet research finds 64% of Americans hide or change their smile for photos, while 62% regret not smiling more openly in past moments.

A [new survey from SmileSet](#) finds that 56% of Americans say smile self-consciousness affects their overall confidence at least a moderate amount, including 29% who say it affects their confidence a great deal. Nearly two-thirds, 65%, believe improving their smile would increase their everyday confidence.

The survey of 1,200 U.S. adults, conducted through Pollfish, examined smile confidence, photo habits, appearance concerns, workplace interactions, dating experiences, artificial intelligence editing, and regrets about hiding natural expressions.

The results show that Americans are not only thinking about how their smiles look. Many are actively changing how they behave in photos, professional settings, romantic situations, and everyday social interactions.

Key Takeaways

- 64% hide or change their smile when taking photos, making photography the leading trigger for smile suppression

- 56% say smile self-consciousness affects their overall confidence
- 55% default to a closed-mouth smile in photos, even when they are genuinely happy
- 65% say improving their smile would increase their everyday confidence
- 57% say improving their smile would make them more confident in dating or romantic situations
- 44% say smile self-consciousness has held them back professionally
- 62% regret not smiling more openly in past photos, events, or social occasions
- 56% have used artificial intelligence tools to edit photos or manage their appearance
- 22% have used artificial intelligence specifically to improve their smile in photos

The “Safe” Smile Has Become the Default

For many Americans, smiling in public is no longer entirely spontaneous. More than one-quarter, 28%, say they intentionally suppress or change their natural smile every day.

That behavior becomes even more common when a camera appears. Nearly two-thirds, 64%, say they are likely to hide or adjust their smile while taking a photo, and 56% use a separate “camera-ready” expression instead of their natural grin.

- 57% hide or change their smile in photos posted to social media
- 55% do so around people they have just met
- 48% alter their smile while on a date
- 48% change or conceal it in the workplace
- 42% do so during work-related video calls
- 40% suppress their smile while laughing unexpectedly

Only 16% say they are likely to hide their smile around close friends, showing that many people lower their guard only around those they trust most.

Men reported suppressing their natural smiles more often than women. More than one-third of men, 36%, said they do so daily, compared with 22% of women. Men were also more likely to use a closed-mouth smile in photos, at 63% compared with 47% of women.

Every Photo Feels High-Stakes

Photos are the most common setting in which smile anxiety changes people’s behavior. Eighty-three percent of Americans say their smile looks different in photographs than it does in real life.

More than half, 55%, default to a closed-mouth smile in photos, while 48% use a practiced, photo-ready expression instead of their natural smile.

- 54% have asked to be untagged from a photo

- 45% carefully select photos based on how their smile looks
- 45% have deleted photos because of their smile
- 44% frequently avoid having their picture taken
- 41% frequently ask for a photo to be retaken

Women were more likely than men to delete an image because of their smile, at 51% compared with 39%. Men and women were equally likely to avoid the camera altogether, with 41% of each group reporting that behavior.

For many Americans, photographs have become something to manage, edit, or avoid rather than spontaneous records of their lives.

Tooth Color Leads Americans' Smile Concerns

The most commonly reported smile insecurity was tooth color. Forty-one percent of respondents said they were concerned about the color of their teeth, including 50% of women and 29% of men.

More than one-third, 36%, were dissatisfied with how their smile looks when their teeth are visible. That figure rose to 45% among Generation Z.

- 31% feel insecure about the alignment or shape of their teeth
- 30% say their smile does not feel natural in photos
- 23% have been told their teeth look stained
- 20% have been told their smile looks forced or unnatural
- 16% have been told their teeth are crooked

Overall, 60% of Americans said they had received at least one negative comment about their teeth, mouth, or smile. Among Generation Z, 32% said someone had told them their smile appeared forced or unnatural.

Even one negative comment can influence how someone smiles, poses, or expresses themselves long after it is made.

Smile Anxiety Is Following Americans to Work and Dating

Smile self-consciousness is not limited to photographs. More than half of Americans, 56%, said it affects their overall confidence, while 48% said it affects how openly they express themselves and connect with other people.

In romantic situations, 46% said smile insecurity had held them back, and 57% said improving their smile would make them feel more confident while dating.

The effects also extend into professional life. Forty-four percent said smile self-consciousness had held them back at work, and nearly one-third, 32%, said they are often or always aware of how others perceive their smile during meetings, interviews, or other workplace interactions.

Men reported greater professional smile awareness than women, at 38% compared with 26%.

Appearance concerns are shaping how people participate, communicate, and present themselves in environments where confidence is closely scrutinized.

Artificial Intelligence Is Becoming Part of Photo Management

More than half of Americans, 56%, said they had used artificial intelligence tools at least occasionally to edit photographs or manage their appearance before posting online.

Nearly one-quarter, 22%, had used artificial intelligence specifically to improve their smile in a photo, and 73% said their smile influences whether they post a picture at all.

Men were considerably more likely than women to use artificial intelligence tools to edit their appearance, at 66% compared with 47%.

Millennials were also more likely to use artificial intelligence photo editing than Baby Boomers. Fifty-nine percent of Millennials reported using the tools, compared with 14% of Baby Boomers.

Appearance-editing technology may make it easier to create a polished image, but it does not necessarily address the confidence concerns that led someone to edit the photo.

Americans Are Taking Steps to Manage Smile Insecurity

Many respondents said they had adopted specific behaviors or explored treatments to feel more comfortable with their smile.

- 41% purposely avoid showing their teeth when smiling
- 35% have practiced a dedicated photo smile
- 26% have researched professional whitening or straightening
- 23% have used at-home cosmetic treatments

Some people conceal their teeth or carefully manage their expressions, while others explore options intended to change the appearance of their smile.

Looking Back at the Smiles They Hid

Although hiding a smile may feel safer in the moment, many Americans later regret holding back. Nearly two-thirds, 62%, said they sometimes regret not smiling more openly in past

photographs, events, or social occasions.

Regret was highest among Millennials, at 76%, followed by Generation Z at 65%. By comparison, 44% of Baby Boomers said they experienced the same regret.

Men reported more regret than women, at 65% compared with 56%.

Comparison may be contributing to that feeling. More than half of Americans, 56%, said they compare their smile with other people's smiles. Men were more likely to report doing so than women, at 61% compared with 50%.

Many people ultimately value having an authentic record of a happy moment more than having a carefully controlled or perfected expression.

As photos, video calls, social platforms, and artificial intelligence editing become more embedded in everyday life, Americans face growing pressure to look polished at all times. That pressure is influencing how people smile, interact, work, date, and preserve important memories.

At the same time, many respondents said they wanted greater confidence, regretted hiding their smiles, and wished they had expressed themselves more openly during meaningful moments. In a heavily filtered world, natural expression may matter more than perfection.

View the full study here:

<https://smileset.com/apps/jurni/smile-confidence-study>

About

[SmileSet](#) provides clear aligner treatment designed to help people improve their smile comfortably and conveniently from home. By making cosmetic dental care more accessible, SmileSet helps customers build confidence in both their appearance and everyday interactions.

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