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New 'Ugly Meter' iPhone App Could Become Tool for Cyberbullies, Critics Say

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A new iPhone app called the "Ugly Meter" is just what cyberbullies -- including elementary school kids -- need to target easy marks, online security experts told FoxNews.com.

The 99-cent app, now available for iPhone users on Apple's iTunes Store, uses facial recognition software that measures symmetry and other features. Downloaded more than 20,000 times and designed for users ages 9 and above, the app scans a snapshot and then submits a score of 1 to 10.

Bo Derek is not a 10. On this scale, you want desperately to be a 1.

A 10 garners this message: "You're so ugly, when you walk by the bathroom, the toilet flushes."

A mere 9.4 gets: "You look like you ran a 100-yard dash in a 90-yard gym."

While the app's creators say they're just having some fun, some critics say the software can be malicious in the wrong hands. It's "right on the borderline" of appropriate and inappropriate, said Stephen Balkam, CEO of the Washington-based Family Online Safety Institute.

"I can see that the guys who programmed it were having a bit of fun and all," Balkam said. "If you're 25, 26 or 28, this sort of thing could be quite funny or amusing. But in the hands of a 14- or 15-year-old, it could be quite the reverse, and particularly if someone is submitting someone else's photograph and then circulated that photo around school."

Balkam said he would discourage his 14-year-old daughter from using the app, but would not ban it outright unless she used it maliciously.

"For impressionable young teens and tweens, it could potentially be quite damaging," he said. "It could be used in cyberbullying."

Dr. Gwenn O'Keeffe, author of "Cybersafe: Protecting and Empowering Kids in the Digital World of Texting, Gaming and Social Media," said she thought the app could theoretically have a "crushing impact" on some young users.

"There's a fine line between teasing and razzing one another," O'Keeffe told FoxNews.com. "And this is just hurtful. It could have crushing blows on kids with low self-esteem. There's just nothing good that could come from an app like this. There are other ways to have fun in life."

O'Keeffe said Apple should consider removing the application from its online store, or perhaps make it unavailable to minors.

"I would like to see Apple not have it at all," she said. "But if they do, it should be for certain age groups."

Apple declined comment when contacted by FoxNews.com, but Eugene Overline, the lead programmer of Dapper Gentlemen, the Arizona-based company that created the application, said concerns about misuse and cyberbullying connected to the "family-friendly" app are unwarranted.

"We did talk about that, and the kids who are doing things like that are going to be doing it one way or another," Overline, 30, said. "They're going to find a way to bully or do whatever they do some way. But it did come up."

Overline, said he "just wanted to do something fun" while creating the "Ugly Meter," adding that most people he's contacted say it's merely a fun game and not something to take too seriously.

"There's nothing in our app that's profane," he said. "All of our insults are PG-rated. We kept it pretty clean on purpose."

Overline, however, is not above putting himself through his own digital crucible, so to speak. His own visage garnered a high score on the "Ugly Meter," he admitted.

"Uh, yeah, unfortunately I pushed an 8.7," he said. "I can't really argue with the results of my own app."

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