

Feeling Fat!?

Maybe Facebook is to blame.

“Do I look fat?” The answer is a resounding yes if you’re on Facebook. But it’s not your friends telling you, it’s yourself.

Facebook is fueling our thin-obsessed culture, says a new study from the Center for Eating Disorders at Sheppard Pratt in Maryland that surveyed 600 Facebook users, ages 16 to 40. More than half said that Facebook makes them more self-conscious about their bodies and weight. And men were some of those with the most negative feelings.

While more women than men admitted they’d like to lose some weight, 75 percent compared to 58 percent, men were far more vocal about their dissatisfaction. Forty percent of men said they’ve posted negative comments about their bodies, while only half that number of women had done so.

“People are now constantly aware of their appearance, thanks to Facebook,” Steven Crawford, associate director at the center, told TechNewsDaily. “A common reaction is, ‘I need to be thinner.’ And it’s that kind of thinking that can lead to hazardous dieting.”

“Facebook is an influential factor in developing severe eating disorders,” Crawford said.

When you’re unhappy with the way you look, it’s easy to avoid mirrors. But it’s becoming pretty tough to go without Facebook. Eight percent of those surveyed log onto Facebook at least once a day. It’s impossible to avoid seeing photos of yourself and your friends. But we’re not just looking—we’re comparing.

Timeline—Facebook’s new profile format—makes it easy. With a click you can see what you looked like five years ago, and the comparison can be depressing. Nearly a third of people felt “sad” when comparing photos of themselves and their friends, and 44 percent wished they had the same body or weight as a friend on Facebook.

Facebook photo comparisons are also affecting the social lives of Facebook users. Like celebrities who worry about the paparazzi, Facebook users are concerned every time they go out that their photo will show up on the network.

“Facebook is fueling a ‘camera-ready’ mentality,” Crawford said. “People look at photos before an upcoming high school reunion and decide not to go.” Why? Because they think they don’t look good enough.

The center has tips for people suffering from Facebook-induced body envy, including subscribing to Facebook pages such as “Adios Barbie” and “End Fat Talk.” But if you can’t stop making negative comparisons between yourself and others, log off.

—LESLIE MEREDITH

