

TIME Health & Family

Social media is all about seeing and being seen, so it's not surprising that the ubiquity and frequency of posts are fueling our vanity.

All the constant attention to social media can make us feel connected, but at the same time might fuel some not-so-pretty emotions as well. A study from researchers in Berlin reported that scanning friends' Facebook pages and photos can trigger feelings of envy and even loneliness. A TODAY Show survey of 7,000 American moms found that 42% suffer from "Pinterest stress," and worry they are not creative enough compared to other moms, which can result in hours of late night clicking through pictures of birthday party favors for inspiration.

(MORE: How Much Younger Does a Face Lift Make You Look?)

Now the annual poll from the American Academy of Facial and Reconstructive Surgery (AAFPRS) reports that social media activity may be driving an uptick in plastic surgery requests.

The survey polled 752 of the AAFPRS' board-certified facial plastic surgeons on the trends in reconstructive and cosmetic surgery. This year, one finding stuck out: surgeons are seeing a 31% increase in plastic surgery requests as a result of how people wanted to present themselves on social media.

"We live in a very visual world, and have come to expect that we will be 'Googled' or 'Facebooked' even before actually meeting someone socially or professionally," says Dr. Sam Rizk, an AAFPRS member and director of Manhattan Facial Plastic Surgery in New York. "I see a lot of men and women who are executives or high profile so they are in the public eye. Their photos get taken all the time and they never know where they may end up. Between high definition television, Facebook, YouTube and Instagram, how you look in photos and video clips has definitely become a driver for all cosmetic procedures from Botox to neck lifts."

(MORE: Pretty Boys: Plastic Surgery Isn't Just for Women Anymore)

The survey shows that growth in cosmetic plastic surgery outpaces demand for reconstructive procedures. Cosmetic surgery accounted for 73% of all plastic surgery operations in 2012, up from 62% in 2011. Among the more popular procedures are rhinoplasty, Botox and facelifts.

The American Society of Plastic Surgeons also released its most recent cosmetic and reconstructive surgery statistics last month, which similarly found that high numbers of Americans continue to go under the knife, with 1.6 million getting cosmetic procedures such as facelifts and rhinoplasty and 13 million receiving less invasive procedures like Botox.

That study also noted that while breast augmentation remains the most popular cosmetic surgery procedure, surgeons are seeing a rise in the upper arm-lift procedure. In 2012, Americans spent \$61 million on procedures to remove excess skin on the back of their arms and since 2000, the group reported a 4,378% increase in the number of these procedures performed. In a ASPS statement, the organization says there is no single reason underlying the increase in requests, but a poll done they conducted showed that women are paying closer attention to celebrities' arms, with the majority admiring first lady Michelle Obama's triceps the most.

(MORE: Plastic Surgeons Say Women Want Arms Like Michelle Obama's)

It's not surprising that people tend to be influenced by the images they see most consistently, which in the past have been of celebrities, but increasingly may include friends as well. And constant reminders of their appearance on social media may be spurring a desire to improve perceived flaws.

“Whether you think it is harmful or not, it is a trend and I don’t think we will see it slowing down anytime soon,” says Rizk. “There is the potential in some individuals with low self esteem and psychological issues to fixate on certain features, such as a prominent nose or a weak chin or a heavy neck. When the concern about your appearance or specific features starts to border on obsession, that can be a red flag.”

He says plastic surgeons try to screen out patients who suffer from body dysmorphia, and will turn down their requests for surgery. “However, even if I refuse, they can always find someone who is willing to operate on them.”

(MORE: Kate Middleton’s Nose Most Requested Celeb Facial Feature in U.K.)

That’s especially concerning since the survey also found that while social media is influencing patients’ decisions to get surgery, it’s not serving as a resource for identifying and vetting surgeons or procedures. Comments from previous patients and advice about recovery can be valuable, if supplemented with objective assessments, for patients shopping for a doctor or wanting to learn more about a procedure, but in 2012, only 7% of patients used social media to research doctors and surgical options, a drop from the 35% who did so in 2011.

(MORE: Why We’re Spending So Much on Botox, Makeup and Facelifts)

The ones who do their research, whether on social media or on other trusted online sites, often have better experiences, says Rizk. “They really do their homework. They go online, are more open to talking about their experiences, and usually see a few doctors in consultation before deciding. The more educated patients are, the better for surgeons.”

Dr. Robert Kellman, the president of the AAFRPS agrees this trend is positive. “I find more patients using what they find online to become more educated and will bring in what they find, and asked to be informed,” he says. “In the past, people took everything they read online as gospel and would even challenge you. I think people are becoming more sophisticated [with their research].” And more demanding on themselves, it seems, about how they look.

MORE: Why Facebook Makes You Feel Miserable