

Video Calls and “Zoom Dysmorphia”

Over the course of the last year, the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the way Americans interact with one another. From work and school to birthday celebrations and happy hours, many people now rely on Zoom and other virtual platforms to connect with the people in their lives. In fact, data shows that in January of 2020, there were approximately 56,000 people per day downloading Zoom in particular. By March, that number increased to about 2.13 million daily downloads. In April of 2020, Zoom released a [statement](#) to address how they were adjusting their platform to accommodate the increase in video call usage.

However, as people across the country attend meetings or hop on their computer to get some face time with friends, many are also experiencing a heightened awareness to their own appearance on camera. That’s how the term “Zoom dysmorphia” was coined. Experts across the country are warning about this new phenomenon, which is comparable to body dysmorphia.

According to the National Institutes of Health (NIH), body dysmorphic disorder (BDD) is a disorder that consists of a distressing or impairing preoccupation with imagined or slight defects in appearance, and is commonly considered to be an obsessive compulsive spectrum disorder.

“One of the things that helps to discern if there is body dysmorphia is somebody who doesn’t like looking at themselves but will spend hours in front of the mirror trying to perfect something about them. And now the kids are at home and adults are at home and they may spend more time checking. They are also seeing their image portrayed on Zoom meetings, where they may focus on something very small that other people don’t notice at all,” explains Marybeth Evans, an OSF HealthCare licensed clinical social worker.

It is estimated that five to ten million Americans suffer from body dysmorphia – a number that is now on the rise due to the increased usage of Zoom.

“People will think ‘my chin is bigger than I thought’ or ‘I have acne’ or those types of things that may cause them to be uncomfortable on Zoom – and I don’t think we think that much about it. We may think this is a vain type of obsession, and it’s really not a vanity. It’s more of an anti-vanity but rather ‘I think I’m so ugly that I don’t want people to see me any more than I have to be seen,’” says Evans.

Evans warns that people should be aware of Zoom dysmorphia and take it seriously, as it could have long-term effects on an individual. In fact, plastic surgery cases have been increasing in the United States and have been tied specifically to people who are experiencing Zoom dysmorphia. Additionally, if you or someone you know is unable to participate in meetings or video calls, or avoids them altogether due to concerns about physical appearance, that may be a sign that it’s time to seek professional help to overcome these issues.

Evans advises, “A lot of times, these individuals may need help on the side such as coming to a therapist like me where I would ask them things. How did it go today? How long did you stay on? Were you able to focus on other people’s faces rather than your own? Were you able to not attend to yourself and your own appearance as much but still speak and participate?”

While there is not a “one size fits all” cause or cure to body dysmorphic disorders such as Zoom dysmorphia, Evans says that the openness and acceptance of people no matter the shape, size, color, gender, and so on is important now even more than ever before.

“I think our society is moving toward that. We see that commercials now include different body types, different ages, different races. I think there is a trend of being more accepting of differences – so hopefully that will also help with body dysmorphia,” Evans says.

If you or a loved one is struggling with mental health it is not an emergency, you can reach out to an OSF Behavioral Health navigator by calling (309) 308-8150. They can direct you to the right resource for what you’re experiencing. [OSF SilverCloud](#) is a no-cost online resource available 24/7.