

Are Tinder users tender about their looks?

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(HealthDay)—Young adults who use the popular dating app Tinder may have lower self-esteem and be less satisfied with their looks, a new study suggests.

Researchers found that of more than 1,300 college students surveyed, those who used Tinder tended to have more issues with self-esteem and body image.

But the study does not prove the [dating app](#) actually feeds those problems.

"We really can't say that Tinder 'caused' anything, based on these results," said lead researcher Trent Petrie, a professor of psychology at the University of North Texas.

And Jessica Carbino, Tinder's resident sociologist, took issue with what she called the study's small sample size and its "limited population"—students at two U.S. colleges.

"The findings cannot be considered significant or representative as a result of major methodological flaws," Carbino said.

But it's important to study the ways in which Tinder—and other social media—affect users' "well-being," according to Petrie.

He said that's partly because of the pervasiveness of social media. Tinder alone has millions of users in nearly 200 countries, according to the company; it claims to have made more than 10 billion "matches" worldwide.

Then there's the way that Tinder operates: Users can accept a potential dating match by "swiping right" on that person's profile after looking at some photos and a short bio. Swiping left means "no, thanks."

"You're judging people quickly, based on looks," said Jessica Strubel, an assistant professor at the University of North Texas who also worked on the study.

And while dating has always involved judgments based on looks, the "accessibility" of Tinder changes things, according to Strubel. You'll only have so many encounters at a singles bar, she noted.

"With Tinder," she added, "you could go through hundreds of 'swipes' in an hour."

Strubel was to present the findings Thursday at the American Psychological Association's annual meeting, in Denver. Research presented at meetings is considered preliminary until published in a peer-reviewed journal.

Neil Bernstein is a Washington, D.C.-based psychologist and author who specializes in young people's mental health issues.

In his experience, Bernstein said, [young people](#) use Tinder for different reasons—just as people use any social media platform for different reasons.

"Is Tinder 'good' or 'bad'?" he said. "It depends on how you use it."

The latest findings, Bernstein said, are based on a small number of Tinder users—out of the millions worldwide who use the app.

"So I wouldn't rush to make generalizations about Tinder users," he cautioned.

That said, the study "opens up an intriguing area of research," Bernstein acknowledged. He agreed that understanding the ways in which social media affect people—positively and negatively—is important.

In the United States, more than one-quarter of 18- to 24-year-olds reported using [online dating sites](#) or mobile apps in 2015, according to a

recent Pew Research survey. That was up nearly threefold from just two years before.

Apps like Tinder seemed to be the driving force behind the growth, the survey found.

For their study, Strubel and Petrie surveyed 1,300 college students—only 102 of whom used Tinder regularly. The researchers said larger, longer studies are needed to show whether Tinder use affects some people's well-being.

For now, Petrie said, the findings show there is a "relationship" between using the dating app and certain [mental health issues](#).

Male users, specifically, scored lower on a standard measure of self-esteem than their peers who were not on Tinder. And Tinder users of both sexes had more issues with body "shame" and dissatisfaction with their looks.

People will inevitably vary in whether and how [social media](#) affects them, according to Bernstein—based on how often they use it, for example, and on their own nature.

Some people who are "socially anxious" might be terrified of putting themselves out there to be judged by internet strangers, Bernstein pointed out. For some others, online dating may be less intimidating than meeting people the old-fashioned way.

"My advice is, know yourself and be true to yourself," Bernstein said.

Petrie also had some advice: Rather than relying on "right swipes" or "likes" to feel worthy, focus on your real-life relationships.

"It's your family and friends who really know you as a person," he said.

More information: The American Psychological Association has more on [social media and mental health](#).

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