

# Understanding Influences on Girls' Desires to Change their Bodies

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# Girls' and Self-Change

- An appreciation of self-change (i.e., self-improvement) is deeply embedded in our cultural value system.
- Psychologists from Carl Rogers to Susan Harter have discussed the importance of self-esteem and striving for an “ideal self.”
- Can self-improvement go too far when it comes to girls' physical appearance?

# “Before” and “After”

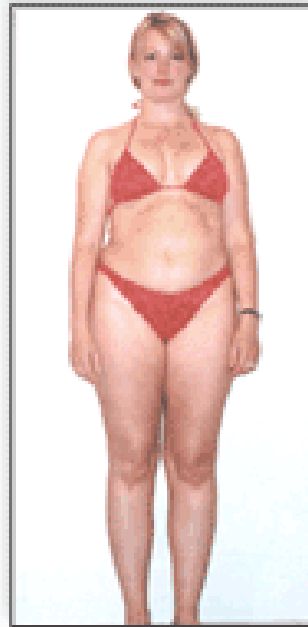


# “Before” and “After”



# “Before” and “After”

Cheryl R. **Before**



**After**



# Girls and Cosmetic Surgery

- Nine million cosmetic surgery procedures were performed on women in 2005, with a growing portion of cosmetic surgery patients being young girls and women in their teens and early twenties (American Society of Plastic Surgeons, 2006).
- In 2005, the most popular cosmetic procedures among women were (in order): breast augmentation, liposuction, nose reshaping, eyelid surgery, and tummy tucks.
- From 2000 to 2005, there was a 15% increase in surgical cosmetic procedures on those under 18 years of age.

# Importance of Understanding Girls' Desires to Change their Bodies

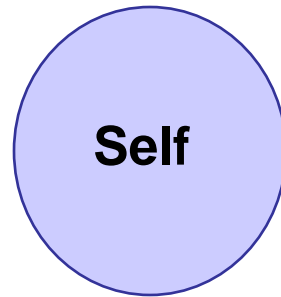
- Understanding this new cultural phenomena is important because cosmetic surgery involves risks, both psychological and physical.
- Understanding girls' desires for surgical cosmetic changes is necessary if preventing girls' from making these changes is a goal.
- Youths' may not consider the long-term effects of their actions, and in this case those actions result in permanent changes.

# Girls' Desires to Change their Bodies

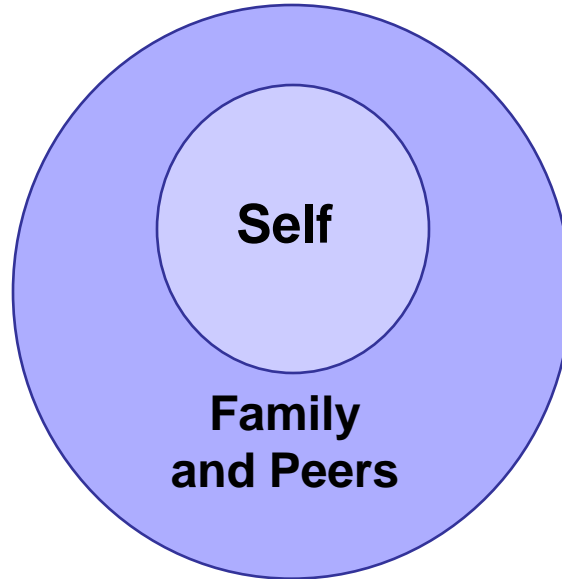
- The body image literature provides a basis from which to start to understand why girls would want to change their bodies in a drastic and permanent manner.
- What are the factors contributing to (and consequences associated with) this “normalization” of cosmetic surgery for aesthetic purposes?



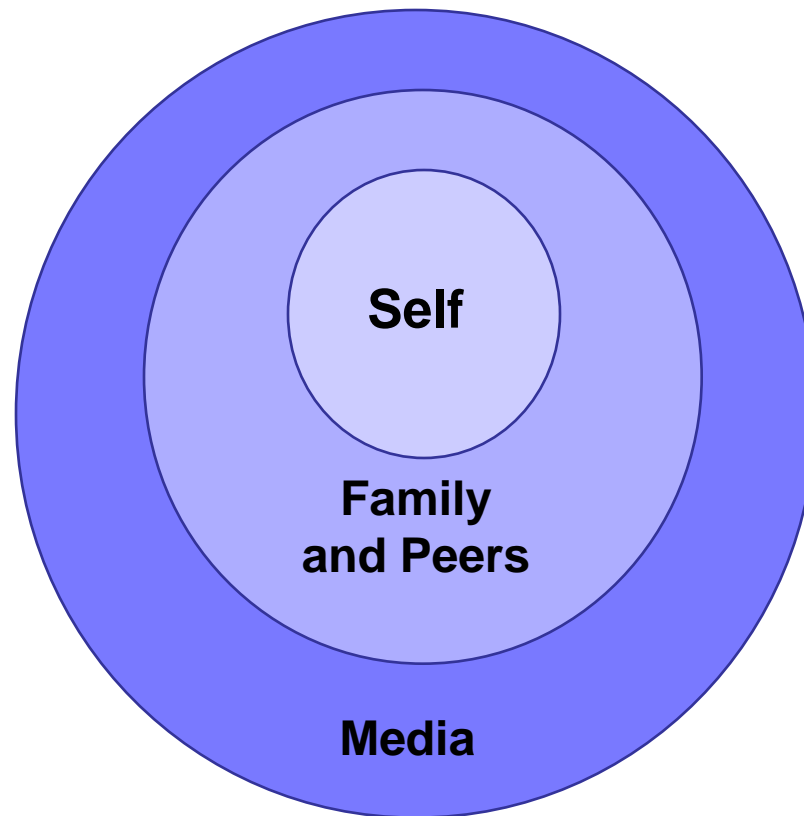
# Influences on Girls' Desires to Change their Bodies



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# Hypotheses

- Weight status and body dissatisfaction will be related to girls' desire to obtain cosmetic surgery.
  - The relation between body dissatisfaction and cosmetic surgery interest will remain significant even when weight status is taken into account.
- Proximal (parents and peers) and distal (media) social influences will be associated with girls' desire to obtain cosmetic surgery.
  - These relations will remain significant when girls' weight status is taken into account.
- Body dissatisfaction will mediate the influence of girls' weight status and social experiences (parent/peer and media) on girls' desire to obtain cosmetic surgery.

# Participants

- 101 Girls in their late teens and emerging adulthood
  - Mean age = 19.9 years
- Predominantly Euro-American (55%)
  - African American, Asian, Hispanic, “other”
- Diverse socioeconomic backgrounds
- Recruited from a northeastern university campus

# Measures

- **Weight Status**

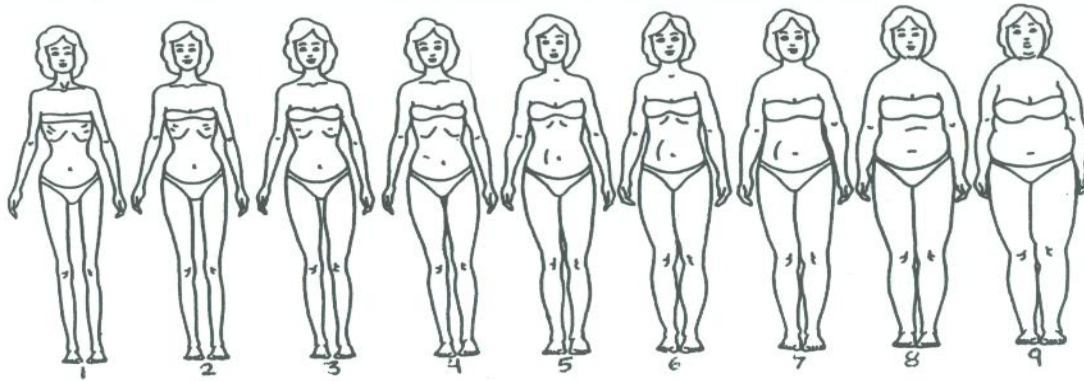
- Body Mass Index (BMI) =  $(\text{weight}(\text{kg})/\text{height}^2(\text{m}))$
- Girls' average BMI was 24.52 (range = 16.10 – 44.63)

- **Body Image**

- **Contour Drawing Rating Scale** (Thompson & Gray, 1995)
- Girls were asked to indicate:
  - Their own body size
  - Their ideal body size

# Measures

- Contour Drawing Rating Scale



1) Which figure looks most like you?      1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

2) Which figure would you like to look like?      1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9

# Measures

- **Parent and Peer Influences**
  - **Physical Appearance Teasing** (adapted from Davison & Birch, 2002)
    - The extent to which they had been teased about 14 different body parts by their parents and peers
- **Media Influence**
  - **Sociocultural Attitudes Towards Appearance Questionnaire** (Thompson, et al., 2004):
    - “I would like my body to look like the models who appear in magazines”
    - “TV programs are an important source of information about fashion and ‘being attractive’.”

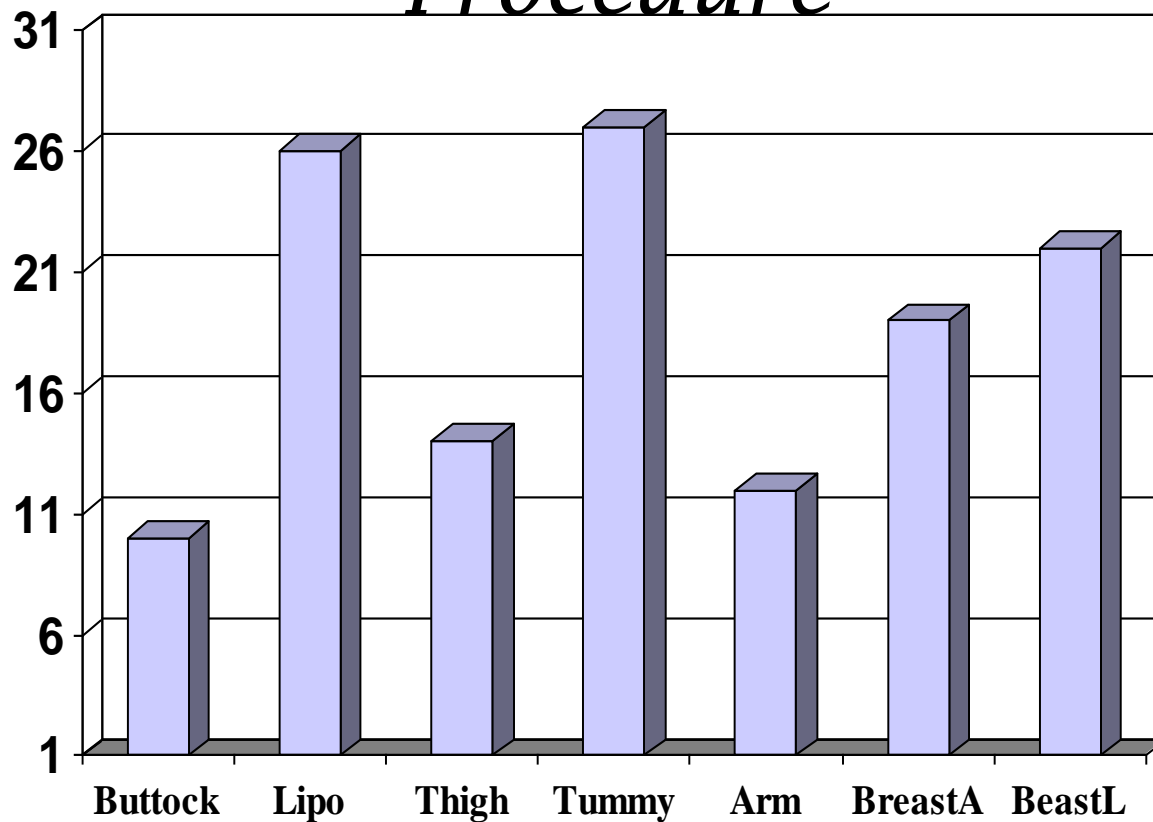


# Measures

- Interest in Cosmetic Surgery
  - A list of cosmetic surgery procedures pertaining to the body
  - Created using information from Sarwer (2001) and the American Society of Plastic Surgeons
  - Participants' rated the extent to which they were interested in obtaining these procedures (1 = I would never consider this procedure to 5 = I would definitely consider this procedure)

# Results: Descriptive Information

## *Participants Interested In Each Procedure*



# Results: Hypothesis 1

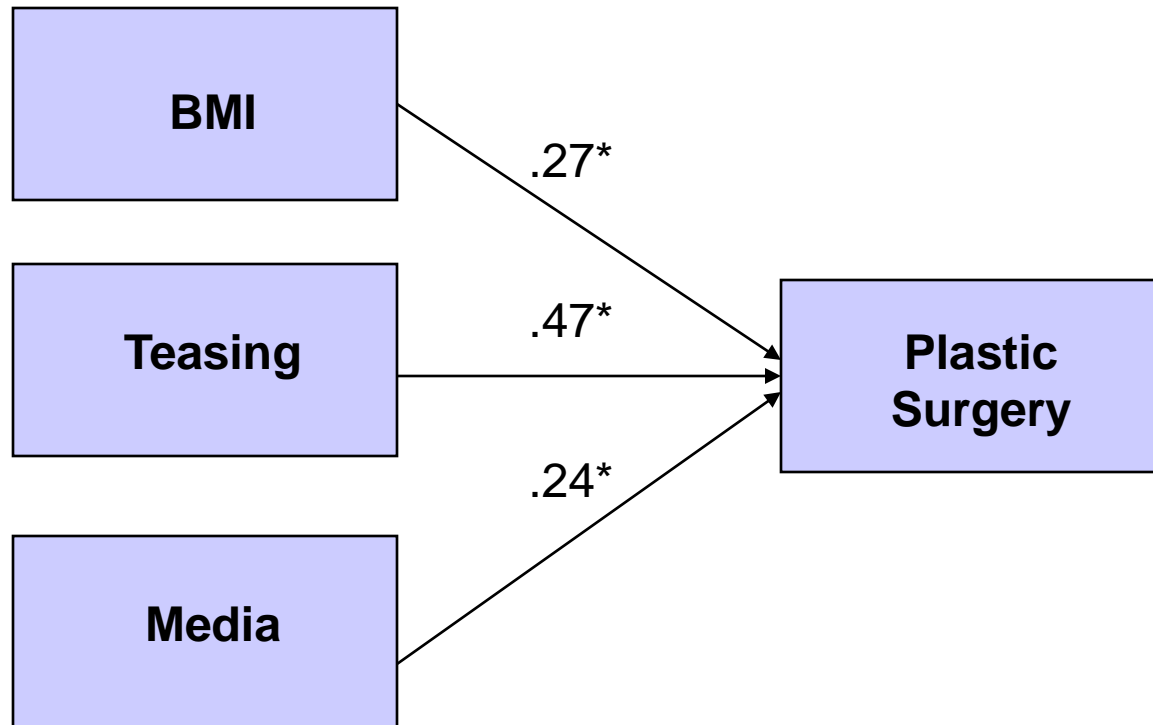
- **Weight status and body dissatisfaction will be related to girls' desire to obtain cosmetic surgery.**
  - Girls who were heavier were more likely to desire cosmetic surgery ( $r = .38, p < .001$ ).
  - Girls who were dissatisfied with their bodies tended to desire plastic surgery more than women who were relatively satisfied with their own bodies ( $r = .52, p < .001$ ).
  - Even when girls' BMIs were taken into account, body dissatisfaction remained a significant predictor of their desire to obtain cosmetic surgery ( $r = .44, p < .001$ ).

## Results: Hypothesis 2

- **Proximal (parent and peer) and distal (media) social influences will be associated with girls' desire to obtain cosmetic surgery.**
  - Girls who were teased by their parents and peers were more likely to desire cosmetic surgery than girls who were not teased ( $r = .38, p < .001$ ).
  - Girls who internalized media messages about physical appearance were more likely to desire cosmetic surgery than girls who did not ( $r = .34, p < .001$ ).
  - Both of these predictors remained significant when girls' weight status was taken into account (teasing  $r = .28, p < .001$ ; media  $r = .31, p < .001$ ).

## Results: Hypothesis 2

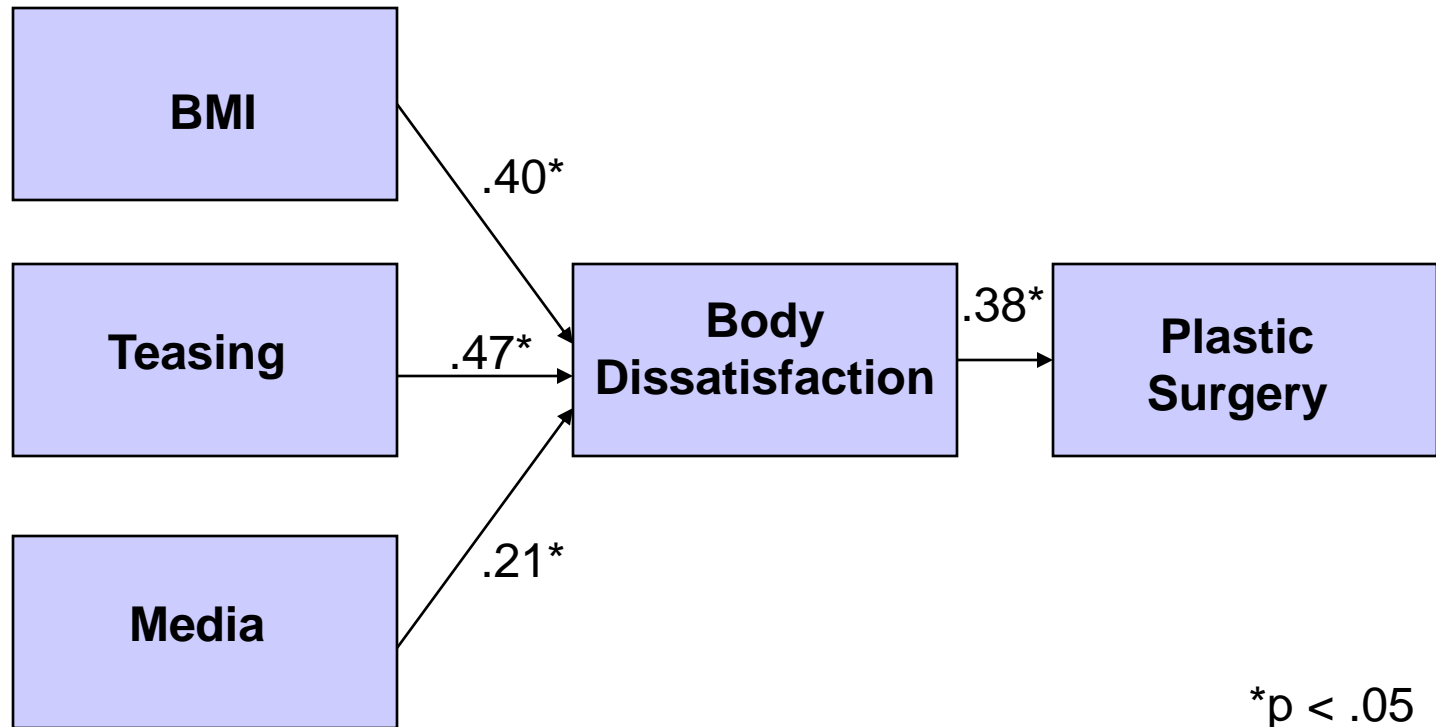
- Proximal (parent and peer) and distal (media) social influences will be associated with girls' desire to obtain cosmetic surgery.



\*p < .05

## Results: Hypothesis 3

- Body dissatisfaction will mediate the influence of girls' weight status, teasing experiences, and internalization of media influences on their desire to obtain cosmetic surgery.



# Discussion

- A surprising percentage of late teenage girls express an interest in obtaining cosmetic surgery.
- Characteristics of girls themselves (their weight status and body dissatisfaction) are predictive of their desire to obtain cosmetic surgery.
- Characteristics of girls' social experiences (their experience of teasing and internalization of media messages) are predictive of their desire to obtain cosmetic surgery.

# Discussion

- Girls' perceptions of their own physical appearance (i.e., their satisfaction with their appearance) may be most important to their decision to pursue cosmetic surgery. Body dissatisfaction mediated all other influences explored in predicting girls' desire to obtain cosmetic surgery.
- This trend towards younger and younger girls expressing interest in surgical fixes to their physical appearances is no doubt associated with two sociocultural trends: a rise in obesity rates and a general cultural acceptance of cosmetic surgery.



# Limitations and Future Directions

- This present research is cross-sectional; research is needed that follows girls longitudinally to determine characteristics of those that go on to obtain cosmetic surgery.
- A better understanding of the “result” of cosmetic surgery for young people needs to be achieved.
- Our current research is experimentally examining media influences on both girls’ and boys’ desires to pursue cosmetic surgery.

# Implications

- Evidence that cosmetic surgery can improve body image, self-esteem, and satisfaction with life in the long-term is not available.
- Cosmetic surgery among teen girls should generally be avoided because it is unnecessary and risky.
- However, unlike other risk behaviors that youth may participate in, cosmetic surgery is a single event that is permanent and may result in considerable remorse.

# Final Thoughts

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# A Final Thought



"NO, WE'RE NOT RELATED. WE JUST HAVE THE  
SAME PLASTIC SURGEON."

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