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How Many Young Women Get Plastic Surgery?

Most Female College Students View Cosmetic Surgery Favorably

By [Miranda Hitti](#)
WebMD Medical News

Reviewed By [Brunilda Nazario, MD](#)
on Monday, February 28, 2005

Feb. 28, 2005 -- Few young women in college have gotten cosmetic surgery, but they don't rule it out in the future.

Only 5% of college students in a recent study said they'd had cosmetic surgery. But most knew people who have been nipped, tucked, or peeled, and many said they would consider it themselves.

Cosmetic surgery skyrocketed 299% from 1997 to 2003, says the study. Medical advances, greater public acceptance of cosmetic surgery, and the media probably all contributed to that, it says.

Most Common Procedures

In the study of 559 female college students aged 17-24, only 5% (30 women) said they'd gotten cosmetic surgery. The most common procedures were:

- [Chemical peels](#): 11 women
- [Breast augmentation](#): 8 women
- Nose reshaping ([rhinoplasty](#)): 6 women
- [Breast reduction](#): 5 women
- [Liposuction](#): 3 women
- [Tummy tuck](#) (abdominoplasty): 2 women
- Eyelids ([blepharoplasty](#)): 2 women
- [Botox](#): 1 woman
- [Cellulite](#) treatment: 1 woman

More Likely Later On?

On the anonymous questionnaire, 40% of all participants said they would consider cosmetic surgery in the near future. Nearly half (48%) said they would consider it by middle age, and 33% said they'd think about it in their 60s.

Overall, the women voiced more favorable than unfavorable attitudes toward cosmetic surgery.

"Ignoring those who responded with indifference, 43% agreed and 32% disagreed with the statement that people should do whatever they want to look good," write the researchers in the March issue of *Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery*.

They add that 45% said they approved and 28% disapproved of people surgically changing their appearance to feel better about themselves.

But most women wouldn't go public with their procedures. More than half said they would be embarrassed to tell people other than family and close friends about it.

Tracing Cosmetic Surgery's Appeal

Why do some young women want to change their appearance with cosmetic surgery? To find out, questionnaire topics included money, media, romance, and body image.

Dollars and dates weren't the answer. "Financial considerations and romantic partners

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seem to have little impact on a woman's interest in surgery," write the researchers, who included David Sarwer, PhD, of the University of Pennsylvania's medical school.

"Less than 30% said they would have surgery if they had an unlimited amount of money and only 5% indicated that they would have surgery at the request of a romantic partner."

Instead, important factors were media images, investment in appearance, and physical comparisons to others. "Women more invested in their appearance and those who internalize mass media images of beauty hold more favorable attitudes toward cosmetic surgery (and vice versa)," write the researchers.

Blowing Problems Out of Proportion?

The study identified 14 women (2.5%) with body dysmorphic disorder. That's a "preoccupation with a slight or imagined defect in appearance that causes significant disruption in daily functioning," write Sarwer and colleagues.

Those women spent more than an hour per day thinking about their appearance. Their obsession was disrupting their lives, including avoiding social activity and romantic relationships.

Only one woman with body dysmorphic disorder underwent cosmetic surgery. She had three procedures ([tummy tuck](#), [liposuction](#), and [breast reduction](#)), and was currently preoccupied with her hands and scalp hair.

Of the women without body dysmorphic disorder, 29% said they were concerned that they weren't thin enough or that they were too fat. But body mass index showed that 77% of them weren't overweight and 5% were clinically underweight.

Is Idealized Beauty Out of Reach?

The mass media bombard consumers with images of beauty like never before, write the researchers. But those images are honed by a team of professionals including makeup artists, stylists, photographers, lighting pros -- and editors wielding airbrushes.

Most women can't live up to that standard. In fact, top models and actresses aren't always born that way. "The current ideal of female beauty -- that of a thin, well-toned, yet big-breasted woman -- rarely occurs without restrictive dieting, excessive exercise, and cosmetic surgery," write the researchers.

SOURCES: Sarwer, B. *Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery*, March 2005; vol 115: pp 931-938. News release, American Society of Plastic Surgeons.

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