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Plastic Surgery

In today's beauty culture, plastic surgery is the most common surgery done in American hospitals, a trend commonly believed to be in response to constant societal pressure for people of all ages to become the "ideal" person – usually defined as someone of a mid-20ish age, slender, with specific measurements and a certain good-looking charm. This limited view of the ideal automatically eliminates anyone who might have been born with a larger bone structure or other 'defect' that defies the reshaping of the scalpel from the ranks of the socially acceptable. However, even for those who can be successfully reconstructed, this restricted view of the ideal has several negative effects on the individual as well as society as a whole. This is especially seen in the rising numbers of teenagers seeking surgery, as it can be potentially harmful to the individual's psychological nature and physical health, and is perpetuated by the role models and peers as well as their parents and elders.

As these types of surgeries become more socially acceptable, more young ladies are turning to cosmetic surgery to enhance their bodies while still attending high school. They are working to construct the ideal form without giving their bodies a chance to finish growing. Many adolescents (and the parents that allow them to seek these types of

surgery) don't seem to realize that plastic surgery is still a form of surgery that can have significant physical and physiological risks, especially when performed on bodies that have not yet completed their growth cycle. As an example, President of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS), Rod Rohrich, pointed to the various individuals taking part in plastic surgery reality television and indicated that many of them have unrealistic and unhealthy expectations for the results (Gustafson, 2005). Because it is a real surgery, involving real risks to health and welfare, doctors suggest that parents carefully consider whether the body part involved is still maturing, how serious the problem or perceived deformity might be, the patient's emotional maturity and ability to understand the problem as well as the realistic expectations surgery might present.

The idea of the psychological maturity is an important factor to consider in determining whether or not the teenager might have realistic expectations for what plastic surgery can do for them. In a Scotland study questioning 2,000 girls with an average age of 14, "four out of ten said they would consider plastic surgery to make themselves slimmer" (Gustafson, 2005). The reason for this was given as pressure from celebrities and comments from boys, who presumably also get their concept of the ideal female from the same source. According to the ASPS, teenagers seek plastic surgery as the only way in which they feel they can be acceptable to their peers (Gustafson, 2005). While surgery may be successful in making them slimmer, it will not give them a one-way ticket straight to the top of the popularity ladder. These misperceptions can have serious psychological ramifications in a variety of areas for the individuals involved as well as those teens who are not able, through lack of funds or availability of sensible parents, to achieve such perfection.

However, the problem does not exist solely in the minds of the teenagers. In most cases, these ideals of the perfect body are originally pointed out by the mothers, who are constantly in pursuit of the teenage waist or the wrinkle free complexion regardless of age. They continue to seek slimming surgeries and face-lifts as a way of chasing that elusive fountain of youth as long as possible, buying into the concept that only young, slim and beautiful is acceptable in the modern day. The woman who looks the youngest, wears the smallest dress size and is able to attract the youngest man is the winner at the table. This fixation on the perfect form for the older crowd as a way of standing out against their contemporaries as a well-preserved individual translates to the younger generation as a requirement to achieving personal success and recognition. “The reinforcement of moms depressed about her weight because they don’t look like magazine models, makes it even more likely for the daughters to be unhappy with their bodies” (Gustafson, 2005).

Reinforced by the ideas and activities of their parents, surrounded by role models that have little more than looks in their favor and still leading fabulous fairytale lives, teenagers have little option but to believe that the ideal form, carefully constructed in the plastic surgeon’s chair, is the only way to acceptance and happiness in today’s world. However, this belief could lead them to take part in surgeries that may be harmful to their physical health and will prove psychologically limiting regardless of whether surgery is performed or not. In the end, it is society as a whole that determines what the ideal human form should look like, and therefore it is equally in the hands of the adults to determine whether physical measurements should define the quality of the individual or if attention should be redirected to more realistic and less superficial attributes.

References

- Gustafson, Rod. "Parenting and the Media." January 18, 2005. Parents Television Council Publications. February 2, 2006
<<http://www.parentstv.org/ptc/publications/rgcolumns/2005/0118.asp>>.