

Female College Students' Attitudes toward Non-surgical Cosmetic Procedures

Jen-Yi CHEN
Fooyin University, Taiwan

Abstract: This paper analyzes findings from focus group discussions with 74 college students who major in a department of health beauty in Southern Taiwan, regarding their perceptions of non-surgical cosmetic procedures, such as collagen injection, intense pulse light, skin rejuvenation laser and chemical peels. The data are discussed in light of feminist theorizing on cosmetic surgery. According to Davis (2003), cosmetic surgery is predicated upon socially constructed definitions of physical normality. The results of this study revealed that some of the students considered that the procedures could increase people's self-confidence and physical appearance. Drawing on the analysis of the findings in light of cultural theory, I suggest that on the one hand micro plastic surgery is represented as a mechanism of personal transformation for some women at individual level to create normative femininity and homogenous appearance norms in a gendered society. On the other hand, micro plastic surgery strengthens oppressive and limited models of appearance norms. In the conclusion, I discuss the implications of this study for public education policies as well as future research on culture, gender and the body.

Keywords: Non-surgical cosmetic procedures, physical attractiveness, self-confidence

1. Introduction

The current ideal of female beauty represented by the media and beauty magazines is that of a young, wrinkleless and thin body (Bordo, 2003; Gimlin, 2002). Women are conditioned to be concerned with their appearances and are under unconscious pressure to attend to and enhance their physical attractiveness through beauty modification techniques such as dieting, exercise and cosmetic surgery. Over the past decade, there has been remarkable growth in the popularity of cosmetic surgery (American Society of Plastic Surgeons [ASPS], 2014). These surgical procedures (e.g. breast augmentation, facelift) and other procedures (e.g. botox injection, laser skin resurfacing) are advertised routinely on television, the billboards on the streets as well as in clinics, and are seen by women who can afford them. Cosmetic surgery has been regarded as a gendered activity which women are more likely to consider having to improve their appearance (Dull & West, 1991).

Decades of research by feminists, social scientists and social critics have focused on the heavy social pressures on females for physical appearance (e.g. Bartky, 1990; Bordo, 2003, Brumberg, 1997; Fallon, 1990; Freedman, 1986; Wolf, 1991). In addition, there has been extensive work on cosmetic surgery (Blum, 2003; Brooks, 2004; Davis, 1995, 2003; Fraser, 2003). However, the extant research on cosmetic surgery has tended to ignore the non-surgical

cosmetic market, which is growing in acceptance among Taiwanese. Therefore, the present study was designed to ask a sample of college age women about their perspectives toward a variety of non-surgical cosmetic procedures (NSCP).

Based on the *International Survey on Aesthetic/ Cosmetic Procedures Performed in 2011* by the International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (ISAPS, 2011), botox injection and hyaluronic acid were ranked the top two world-wide nonsurgical procedures, which were also the top two procedures in Taiwan (40,061 and 25,116 procedures respectively; see Table 1). The data for surgical procedures indicates that the most common procedure is lipoplasty, undertaken by 14,529 people in 2011 (ISAPS, 2011; see Table 1). Taiwan was ranked the 18th country according to the number of plastic surgeons worldwide (ibid, 2011). In terms of “countries by total number of procedures”, Taiwan accounted for 1.1 percent of total surgical procedures worldwide (ibid, 2011). In Taiwan, according to the study by Allergan Company (quoted in Uho news, 2011), over half (55%) of the 10,466 people who had non-surgical cosmetic procedures in 209 hospitals reported that they underwent the procedure to get rid of the wrinkles. This suggests that more and more non-surgical and surgical cosmetic procedures are practiced to enhance people’s appearance in Taiwan. According to a report by Yahoo News (2011), there are 100,000 non-surgical cosmetic procedures in Taiwan every year. The rates of women having non-surgical cosmetic procedures are increasing; women continue to substantially outnumber men in the patient population. Traditionally, office workers and freshmen of the society are two major consumer groups for the non-surgical cosmetic procedures. However, with the decrease in age, more and more university students choose non-surgical cosmetic treatments (Jhou & Wang, 2011) to comply with contemporary beauty norms. The \$ 2 billion cosmetic procedures industry is dominated by this relatively new and growing area of aesthetic medicine, non-surgical cosmetic procedures, such as soft tissue fillers, laser hair removal and botox.

Table 1. Top Five Surgical and Non-surgical Cosmetic Procedures in Taiwan for 2011*

Surgical Cosmetic Procedures	Non-surgical Cosmetic Procedures
Lipoplasty (14,529)	Botulinum Toxin (40,061)
Breast augmentation (10,038)	Hyaluronic Acid (25,116)
Rhinoplasty (8,981)	Laser hair removal (15,138)
Blepharoplasty (7,998)	Autologous fat (6,405)
Abdominoplasty (5,618)	IPL laser treatment (5,898)

* From: International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery. (2011). *ISAPS Global Statistics*.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The practice of cosmetic surgery was originally developed to help the reconstructive needs of wounded male soldiers (Gilman, 1999) to “restore the body to its ideal prior state” (p.10). The contemporary practice of cosmetic plastic surgery, according to the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, is defined as follows: “includes surgical and nonsurgical procedures that reshape

normal structures of the body in order to improve appearance and self-esteem” (ASPS, 2014). In other words, the practice of cosmetic surgery is more than doing reconstructive surgery on soldiers who have been wounded. It becomes an ideal way of achieving a socially prescribed image of beauty and identity. According to the most recent available statistics, women made up the vast majority of cosmetic surgery patients and of non-surgical cosmetic patients (ASPS, 2013). In the year 2013, women were approximately 91% of all cosmetic surgery patients in the United States. Among non-surgical cosmetic procedures, botox injection was the most popular procedure in 2013 (5,935,802 procedures). The cosmetic surgery is one of the most rapidly expanding fields in the beauty system today (Wolf, 1991, p. 232).

However, this definition of cosmetic plastic surgery by ASPA is considered problematic because it asserts the reshaping of one’s appearance from *abnormal* to *normal*. Feminist scholars have criticized cosmetic procedures’ normalizing effects as they argue that the surgeries are used to ‘deny’ any undesirable body markers to normalize the female body and to achieve feminine ideals of beauty and youth (Wolf, 1991; Morgan, 1991; Blum, 2003; Bordo, 2003). Normal is often represented by societal, especially the media’s standards (Bordo, 2003, pp. 25-32). This phenomenon is characterized by Brooks (2004, p. 225) as “aesthetic conformity” to erode women’s naturally given diversity and difference to make women appear younger as defined by strict cultural ideals. In her article, Morgan (1991, p.28) addresses the question: why do “actual, live women ...choose to participate in anatomizing and fetishizing their bodies as they buy ‘contoured bodies’, ‘restored youth’ and ‘permanent beauty’” by experiencing cosmetic surgery. To answer the question, she has developed a “feminist hermeneutics to understand the words and choices of women situated in an interface position with various so-called experts in Western culture” (ibid, p. 26). Morgan argues that cosmetic surgery is the means of the male-identified woman to conform to the norms of beauty (ibid, p. 36). Ordinary-looking women are deceived into believing that their bodies are abnormal and they can undergo cosmetic surgery to achieve ideal female appearance. Cosmetic surgery makes “obligatory the appearance of youth and reality of ‘beauty’ for every woman who can afford it” and makes feminine ideals of youth and beauty ‘technologically achievable” (Morgan, 1991, pp. 40-41). Additionally, feminists have claimed that women’s subordinate status in society contributes to the limited standard of femininity, where the predominant ideology of beauty ideal has the power to govern women (Bordo, 2003; Wolf, 1991). Bordo (2003) claims that female bodies have become “docile bodies — bodies whose forces and energies are habituated to external regulation, subjection, transformation, ‘improvement’” (p. 166). Kirkland and Tong (1996) also examine the industry’s trick to make women believe that cosmetic surgery is necessary for their psychological health and contend that cosmetic surgical procedures are primarily used for aesthetic reasons.

However, some feminists argue that women who choose cosmetic surgery exert free power in controlling their appearance and lives (Davis, 1991, 1995, 1997; Gillespie, 1996; Negrin, 2002). Davis (1991, p. 22) argues that it is problematic to regard cosmetic surgeries as “medical misogyny” and presume that women are being tricked by society. In her book *Reshaping the Female Body*, Davis (1995) maintains that women agency is *within* oppressive cultural circumstances and asserts that women who undergo cosmetic surgery are taking control of their lives. Women have power to liberate their bodies and build their self-esteem by cosmetic surgery. One woman Davis interviewed narrated her decision to have cosmetic surgeries as follows:

“I’m doing it for myself and not for someone else” while another enthusiastically described her experience of breast augmentation surgery: “I guess it *was* pretty brave of me to take this step... I’m really glad I did it, I’m glad I took this step” (Davis, 1995, pp. 127-128). As suggested by ASPS (2014), plastic surgery is “a personal choice and should be done for yourself, not to fulfill someone else’s desires or try to fit an ideal image”. These women underlined their active and lived experience with their bodies and showed how they can knowledgeably choose to have cosmetic surgery. In Davis’s view, cosmetic surgery should not be viewed as another instance of the subjugation of women, but both a “symptom of oppression and act of empowerment, all in one” (1997, p. 24). For Gillespie (1996), it is a woman’s “individual choice” to decide to achieve cosmetic surgery, “enmeshed in social and cultural norms or choice socially and culturally constrained” (p. 79) to conform to feminine ideals of youth and beauty (Wolf, 1991; Morgan, 1991; Gillespie, 1996; Bordo, 2003).

Cosmetic surgery has regarded the body as an object to be reshaped, re-gutted and re-built by a doctor’s hands (Chisholm & Driedger, 1996). In media texts, women’s bodies have been pieced. A woman’s body is a group of body parts and a source of materialization in various media but especially television because of its visual impact (Shields & Heineken, 2002). Bartky (1990, p.71) points out that this produces a “‘practiced and subjected body’... on which an inferior status has been inscribed”. It is this status that gives “a woman’s sense of herself as female and...to her sense of herself as an existing individual” (Bartky, 1990, p. 77). Against the background of a pervasive sense of bodily deficiency, the female body serves as a space in which the kissable lips, hydrated complexion and eyes must be taken up and practiced. As Morgan (1991, p. 30) argues, “there is no area of the body that is not accessible to the interventions and metamorphoses performed by cosmetic surgeons intent on creating twentieth century versions of ‘femina perfecta’”. Additionally, Kilbourne (1995) argues:

A woman is conditioned to view her face as a mask and her body as an object, as *things* separate from and more important than her real self, constantly in need of alteration, improvement, and disguise. She is made to feel dissatisfied with and ashamed of herself, whether she tries to achieve “the look” or not. Objectified by others, she learns to objectify herself (p. 122).

Two recent studies involve women’s interest in and use of non-surgical cosmetic procedures. Muise and Desmarais (2010) surveyed three hundred and four Canadians (aged 19 to 73), who were recruited both on-line and from attendees at the Anti-aging Show in Toronto. Women in this study described an interesting paradox whereby they reported using these products while being critical of media messages and embracing the idea of natural aging. Clarke, Repta, and Griffin (2007) interviewed forty-four women aged 50-70 about their perceptions of and experience with non-surgical cosmetic procedures (e.g. botox injection, chemical peels). Twenty-one women of their sample had had one or more such procedures, which they said they had had to enhance their self-esteem and attractiveness. Those who had not had cosmetic procedures considered them too risky, unhealthy or the social devaluation of aging. Treatments that concerned the injection of foreign substances into the body tended to be perceived as riskier and more unacceptable than those that focused on the surface treatments.

Previous research has alluded to the role of cosmetic surgery in normalizing effects to

'deny' any undesirable body markers or in women's freely exercising choice and agency. The lack of research on college-aged women's attitudes and perspectives regarding non-surgical cosmetic procedures (NSCP), combined with the recent and fast-growing phenomenon of young people electing to have NSCP precipitated the current research.

3. Data and Methods

The data for this paper are drawn from semi-structured focus group discussions with 74 female college students with major in the department of health beauty who had not had any cosmetic procedures. The subjects in the study represented a "purposeful rather than random" sample because they had specialist knowledge of the research issue, non-surgical cosmetic procedures and would be able to attribute to appropriate data, both in terms of relevance and depth. As Hesse-Biber & Leavy (2011, p.45) note, the type of purposive sampling is based on "the particular research questions as well as consideration of the resources available to researcher." The discussions were conducted between October and December 2013 at a university in Southern Taiwan. The number of students participating in each session was between eight and ten. These students were recruited because they took the cosmeceutical-related courses and have specialist knowledge about surgical and non-surgical cosmetic procedures, such as breast augmentation, cellulite treatment, injectable fillers and laser skin resurfacing. A focus group is defined as "a discussion conducted by a trained moderator in a non-structured and natural manner with a small group of participants" (Malhotra et al., 2007, p. 182). Krueger & Casey (2009, p. 67) suggest that 5-8 members are the ideal size of a focus group when creating dynamics to deliver a rewarding discussion, while not being too many which could arouse the creation of sub-groups. The main advantage of adopting this method is that a broader set of data can be attained through the interactions that are induced among the participants (Malhotra et al., 2007, p. 187). In other words, the focus group format can help the researcher gather exploratory data, particularly through the conversation and dynamics of each focus group session. The use of semi-structured focus-group interviews is to allow "participants to respond, at length, in their own 'language' and on their own terms" (Hansen, 1998, p. 273). Seventy-four female college students aged 21-22 were divided into eight groups. Each focus group session was held in a classroom for an average of one and half hours between October and December, 2013. The interview schedule was a guideline for the conversation between the researcher and the research participants to keep the interviews responsive to the ideas and issues raised by the students. With the consent of each participant, each focus group session was recorded and transcribed verbatim. It is assumed that the female college students with the major in health beauty would view the non-surgical cosmetic procedures as a positive, if not necessary, choice available to women.

Analysis of data began with the reading and rereading of the transcripts to generate an initial code book of 13 codes, one of which was "perspective towards non-surgical cosmetic procedures," the focus of this paper. This code was read again to yield three interrelated and emergent themes (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998), namely, non-surgical cosmetic procedures as a means of enhancing the physical attractiveness, non-surgical cosmetic procedures as a means of upgrading self-confidence and saying no to non-surgical cosmetic procedures.

4. Analysis and Findings

In this section, the three recurring emergent themes found in the analysis of college women's perceptions of non-surgical cosmetic procedures are presented.

4.1. Non-surgical Cosmetic Procedures as a Means of Enhancing the Physical Attractiveness

Thirty-five female students expressed positive feelings towards non-surgical cosmetic procedures as they commented on what they would look like after the procedures:

Since we are the students of the department of health beauty, we used to have practical training in the cosmeceutical clinic. We know what it's like and know the result of the procedures. I'm only 21 now and do not consider undergoing the procedure. But in future, when I get older, probably about 30 years old, I'll have intense pulsed light or microdermabrasion to maintain the appearance.

Most of these students stated that the results of the procedures would change their look and create a rejuvenating appearance:

I just think now I don't have enough money to do this even though I'm not happy with my look. But, I'll save the money first and undergo the non-surgical cosmetic treatments in future. I think I'll look much more beautiful and attractive.

The majority of the students indicated that:

The society today is becoming increasingly focused on visual image. The stars in the Korean dramas and Korean movies have flawless white porcelain skin, large round eyes and nice nose. Most Korean female stars or even male stars have done plastic surgeries to achieve their perfect faces even though many deny getting work done on them. People are influenced and encouraged by them to undergo the knife to hope to look like them. But, cosmetic surgeries cost much more; so I think I'll choose the non-surgical cosmetic procedures first.

For the young, the celebrity culture has conveyed certain messages to them and has taken over many young people's minds in some ways. Since the late 1990s, South Korean television drama series, pop music and films have been popular in East and Southeast Asia. The recent appeal of Korean popular culture and phenomenon has been branded '*hanliu*' (*hallyu* or *hanryu* in Korean) in 1997 and the Chinese acronym is the 'Korean Wave'. Due to the increasing popularity of Korean stars and Pop singers, the young people bring a photo of a Korean star to the cosmeceutical clinic and request to have features that are similar to them to obtain a socially constructed ideal of attractiveness.

One of the participants stated that

I'd like to have Botox treatment to correct my expression lines when I have money. Because I like to laugh and make faces, I have a few lines around my mouth and crow's feet around my eyes, which make me look older than my friends. I know that Botox is fast and highly effective. There is no recovery period necessary. After this, my face will begin to look more refreshed and smoother.

Here, NSCP is not only a way for women to express who they are but also a means for others to develop an opinion about who they think they are. They try to maintain their identity with societal codes of acceptable appearance. To achieve the societal codes of acceptable appearance, their bodies become a project through which they are constructing a new identity, *a feminine identity* (Bartky, 1990). As Brumberg (1997, p. 97) puts it, “the body is a consuming project for contemporary girls because it provides an important means of self-definition, a way to visibly announce who you are to the world.”

Some students are saying they would undergo procedures if they could afford to do so. Perhaps because these participants have made it clear that the financial cost is prohibitive, they cannot possibly partake NSCP - they are able to admit that they have considered it. Financial cost is the barrier that stops them from doing it now. In other words, if the cost of non-surgical cosmetic treatment is reduced, the number of college-aged students having the procedures will increase.

With the prevalence of promising women an outcome and an ideal way of looking from the advertisements for NSCP in the media, more and more college-aged students will not be satisfied with their look, size and shape. As Woodstock (2001, p. 422) argues, “cosmetic surgery’s benefits are continually rearticulated in accord with changing social norms of beauty and health”. The past and present media portrayals of cosmetic surgery suggest that cosmetic surgery is a “solution” to the imperfect appearance and also to women’s low self-confidence related to their appearance, which also reflects the present media portrayals of non-surgical cosmetic procedures.

4.2. Non-surgical Cosmetic Procedures as a Means of Upgrading Self-confidence

Twenty-four female students stated that having the procedures would have made them feel more attractive and more self-confident and thus would make it easier to meet men or find a job:

Because I used to work in the clinic, women who had such procedures looked very different and more confident. I see the visible changes in their appearances. I think women with appealing looks have better chances to get a good job and to meet a nice guy. The first impression is very important when you meet someone. Besides, if I can make a good impression on the interviewer at my job interview, the chance for me to get the job is much higher. I watched the news reports and they said women with beautiful look are more popular in the job market and are more likely to get promoted.

Several of these students argued that the existence of non-surgical cosmetic procedures was a good choice for them because it is not too expensive and not so risky compared to the traditional forms of plastic surgery:

I believe that it’s a good thing that non-surgical cosmetic procedure is becoming more commonplace. It’s not just glamour celebrities that are going for laser skin resurfacing or Botox injection to look in a certain way. It’s not a privilege of the wealthy. We as the general public can improve our looks and self-confidence by the offer of the non-surgical cosmetic procedure.

Yes, if we have nice and beautiful looks, we'll feel better about ourselves and boost our confidence. Now modern technology has greatly reduced the number of complications arising from traditional forms of procedures. So, I think it's safe to have non-surgical procedures to improve our self-confidence by heightening our body image.

These students expressed positive feeling towards all non-surgical cosmetic procedures as they talked about this in relation to the achievement of job and relationship. Some students are obsessed with their appearances because they are unable to maintain relationships with men. In addition, they thought if they could change their external appearances, they would be able to change their internal issues such as self-confidence. They view non-surgical cosmetic procedure as a means of achieving positive self-confidence in which a female student is able to gain control over her body. According to the result of the literature review by Figueroa (2003, p. 23), there is a strong, direct correlation between self-esteem levels and cosmetic surgery. Female participants feel more attractive and increase their feelings of self-esteem and self-worth by improved appearance. Besides, Montell (2003) writes that owning a socially acceptable look assures success.

Some students referred to prominent Korean stars they like as examples of how NSCP resulted in an appealing appearance:

Because my skin is dark, I would like to have whitening needles procedure to quickly lighten my skin complexion. I like Jun Ji-hyun. I think her skin is really beautiful and fair. There is a real inferiority complex associated with being dark. Many feel that girls who are fair are considered more attractive. Now I'm using the whitening skincare products that claim to lighten the skin. After I graduate, I'll choose to have whitening needles procedures.

These supportive themes are reflective of the role of "habitus" (Bourdieu, 1984) in developing how these female students value their appearance and the importance of physical attractiveness in daily life. Making a good impression through NSCP appeared to center on being able to produce an idealized image of them that attracts a degree of attention. These female students project aspects of themselves through appearance that enhances them being favorably received by others and presenting themselves as confident. Self-confidence and external appearance play a prominent role. A female student can improve her appearance through the use of NSCP such as Botox, intense pulsed light and microdermabrasion in addition to using makeup and hair lightener. The way in which these students construct their social identity is shaped by cultural and social exposure (Bourdieu, 1984).

In this sample, the NSCP the participants would most like to have was botox injection. It is no surprise that Botox injection was the top procedure sought by the students because they want to look refreshed and youthful. However, the whitening needles, which deliver vitamins and bleaching agents to a woman's skin, is the second frequently requested operation. Skin whitening is one of the phenomena across Asia. Skin-whitening products have been a multimillion-dollar industry in Asia for decades. Asians are not necessarily making an effort to be more Westernized, rather it is believed that lighter skin signifies they are more beautiful and live a more comfortable life in Asian culture. Having darker skin means they are doing manual

labor for living. A porcelain white face is the feminine ideal, reflecting a long-held belief that “white skin covers 3 uglinesses”. A porcelain white face can hide physical imperfections. Asian obsession with fair skin plays a key role in feminine identity construction.

The findings regarding enhancing the physical attractiveness and upgrading self-confidence suggest that college-aged women’s perspectives on non-surgical cosmetic procedures have been shaped by cultural and societal exposure that have taught women the importance of appearance and the body. All of their lack of confidence is attributed to their perceived “unattractiveness”. Women are increasingly portrayed and celebrated in the media for their perfect body; this constant bombardment with images of unattainable yet idealized feminine embodiment may lead them to feel their own external appearance is not acceptable. Through the use of non-surgical devices, women will be able to attain their idealized versions of themselves with the hopes of constantly becoming more perfect as ‘we may be obsessed with our bodies, but we are hardly accepting of them’ (Bordo, 2003, p.15). This brings to shed light on the reality of body dysmorphic disorder (BDD). As women keep facing more unrealistic pressures to look in a certain way, BDD will become even more widespread, which will have a dramatic effect on their identity and sense of self.

4.3. Saying No to Non-surgical Cosmetic Procedures

However, in contrast to the two emergent themes discussed above, a smaller number of students (fifteen) indicated that they were uninterested in spending their money or their time on non-surgical cosmetic procedures. Students here indicated that they appreciated what they already have:

I am happy with what my parents gave me. Natural look is beautiful for me. I’m not an appearance-oriented person. So, I don’t care so much about my look.

It really seems to me to be quite psychologically dysfunctional. The part of this culture of perfection is ridiculous. No one is perfect, as long as you are confident about who you are, you won’t be influenced by those promoted images in the media.

In addition, this group of students expressed fear regarding the safety of the non-surgical cosmetic treatments:

We saw a lot of news reports about some women spending thousands of dollars in plastic surgery transforming their faces to resemble any stars or celebrities. But, they finally turned into dreadful changes of their looks as a result of low grade ingredients, surgical errors or inexperienced doctors. So, I don’t want to lose my natural look. If I went for the wrong cosmetic surgery, I would have lost my face, even my life.

Now there are many complications of medical treatments arising from plastic surgery, including non-surgical cosmetic procedures. Questions are being raised about the risk of such surgeries. The government has not regulated the cosmetic surgery industry.

I used to work in the clinic. Most doctors or beauticians don’t explain the risks associated with the treatments to the patients. They only tell the patients that their skin will look much smoother and illuminating after the treatments. However, no cosmetic

surgery is totally risk free. There is a chance of infection, bruising or bleeding with any operation.

The students against non-surgical cosmetic procedures stated reasons related to the importance of being comfortable with and accepting their own 'natural' looks. The cultural and social exposures of these students dictate that appearance concerns are superficial and women should be happy with their natural body. The safety of non-surgical cosmetic procedures emerged among respondents who were unsupportive of it as well. Interestingly, the cost of NSCP did not emerge among participants who did not support it.

The importance and accessibility of non-surgical cosmetic procedure is growing in Taiwan, where the social need for a better physical attractiveness is rising. People, the majority of whom are women, undergo botox injection, laser skin resurfacing and other surgical procedures. The traditional Chinese medicine doctors also use acupuncture therapy to promise women to lift the facial muscles, stimulate the increase of collagen, and firm the skin. In this study, the benefits of non-surgical cosmetic procedures appear to go beyond enabling students to feel better about their physical appearance. It also extends to their self-confidence, future career and relationships. The self-confidence of some students in this group is primarily dependent on their physical appearance. Their relationship with their body appearance becomes a 'product', the activity of buying cosmeceutical treatments, of consumer culture. Hence, I argue that non-surgical cosmetic procedures have become a mechanism of personal transformation for some women at individual level to create normative femininity and homogenous appearance norms in a gendered society. On the other hand, non-surgical cosmetic procedures have strengthened oppressive and limited models of dominant beauty norms. The prevalence of the body undergoing non-surgical cosmetic procedures, combined with celebrity culture and description of the effects on the body, encourage up-to-date non-surgical cosmetic procedure-friendly understanding of the body. However, the new trend has caused controversy. According to Dr. Pou-an Liu (quoted in *Awakening News Network*, 2013) the rates of people addicted to cosmetic surgery are 32 percent among those who have had cosmetic surgery, higher than the rates in the kingdom of cosmetic surgery, South Korea, 10 percent. The non-surgical cosmetic procedure trend is to be blamed for the pressuring of people, especially young people, into getting such treatments that they don't need, nor afford.

5. Conclusion

The current research, involving a sample of college-aged women who major in the department of health beauty at a university in the southern Taiwan, was conducted using semi-structured focus group discussions. I have discussed how some of the female college students viewed non-surgical cosmetic procedures as a means to increase their physical attractiveness and, consequently their self-confidence, future career and romantic success, whereas others said no to non-surgical cosmetic procedures. In our youth and health obsessed society, the increasing rates of non-surgical cosmetic procedures suggest the importance of gender to understanding what 'aesthetic improvement' might be considered to resolve people's concerns for their appearance to disguise their real or imagined 'defects'.

Research shows that the idea of a cosmetic makeover in the early 1900 was depicted as the first step toward achieving upward mobility and personal popularity (Peiss, 1996, p. 323). Nowadays, the makeover including plastic surgeries and non-surgical cosmetic procedures has taken on a different role. Some views it as a means for feminine identity, job promotion and personal achievement. The majority of advertisements for cosmetic surgeries and non-surgical cosmetic procedures glorify the process as something women need to make them look 'normal'. The idealized discourse of beauty is so rooted in our culture that women are making every effort to reach a perfect state that can never be attained no matter how many procedures they suffer or skincare product they use. Millions and millions of non-surgical cosmetic procedures every year reflects a true testimony of society's increasing fixation on physical imperfections to become a 'better' you. As Butler (1999) argues, "these limits are always set within the terms of a hegemonic cultural discourse predicated on binary structures that appear as the language of universal rationality" (p. 11).

The findings yield a new direction for research on the cosmetic surgery in a non-surgical population of college-aged women: illustrating that bodies are not merely changed, but "physically technologized" via non-surgical cosmetic surgery in accord with prevalent cultural conceptions. However, cosmetic procedures, or non-surgical cosmetic procedures are not a cure for everything. It is problematic to assume that the new and 'improved' appearance can work as a cure-all for their problems.

As non-surgical cosmetic treatments are further normalized, it is likely that this practice will become more common in the future to stave off body discontent to meet unrealistic societal standards of attractiveness to satisfy women's own feeling of self-confidence and self-worth. This trend and culture phenomenon in the cosmetic surgery does not seem to be ending as an increasing number of cosmeceutical clinics continue to dominate the market and revel in women's dissatisfaction with their appearances. As long as there are airbrushed pictures and fanciful models telling women that they must improve, the cycle will not be interrupted. As the benefits of non-surgical cosmetic treatments are subtly portrayed in the real lives of female celebrities, it is likely that the young female population will believe that self-confidence or self-worth can only be achieved through attractive beauty. This increasing hypervisibility of the female body may impede the development of self-esteem, leading to lower self-confidence. Overall, as women continue to base their ideas of physical attractiveness on the social reality learned within their habitus, they will often find that their perfect body is not achievable and acts as a source of dissatisfaction with the self.

The government has noticed that the age of women who have non-surgical cosmetic surgery is decreasing. According to the Ministry of Health and Welfare (2014), there were 800 people under the age of 20 who underwent the surgical and non-surgical cosmetic procedures carried out in Taiwan in 2013. Ninety-five percent of the people chose laser skin resurfacing and five percent of the people chose liposuction, facelift and nose reshaping. Therefore, the Ministry of Health and Welfare has passed a bill in February, 2014 that surgeons are not allowed to conduct the cosmetic surgery for people under the age of 18, except for medical reasons. Non-surgical cosmetic procedures continue to gain popularity, and more people are seeking low-cost treatments. Therefore, it is important for the authorities to consider two suggestions. First of all, it is expected that closer and tougher regulation of the cosmetic surgery industry should

be required in the future to protect the consumers and practitioners. Second, the Ministry of Education should train teachers to offer body image and self-esteem lessons to the students. While the rates of people addicted to cosmetic surgery are 32 percent among those who had cosmetic surgery in 2013 and the age of undergoing the treatment is decreasing, it is necessary to develop a course on positive body image to improve self-esteem.

The results of the present study should be interpreted in the context of a number of limitations, including the homogeneous nature of the sample. It is worth mentioning at this point that the purpose of this study is not to make overall generalizations about how *many female college students* look at the issue of non-surgical cosmetic procedures, but to understand the way in which the female college students interact with cultural messages of non-surgical cosmetic procedures from the media. The female college students in this study were from the same department at a university in Southern Taiwan. Cross-department variation, for example, among students from the department of biotechnology or department of nutrition and health science, may provoke varying interest in non-surgical cosmetic procedures. In addition to examine more diverse educational and/or cultural backgrounds, future research may wish to further explore how male college students think of the feminine forms of body modification, non-surgical cosmetic procedures. In general, an increasing number of male celebrities choose to undergo the non-surgical cosmetic procedures to increase their masculinity, such as six packs (Huang, 2010). It is possible that the decreased body satisfaction and greater importance of physical masculinity among male college students may maximize the acceptance of non-surgical cosmetic treatments in this group. Future research might also investigate the possibility of using the media to encourage positive body image and attitudes towards beauty and masculinity in different age- groups among women and men.

References

- American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS). (2013). *2013 Cosmetic surgery gender distribution*. Retrieved: March 12, 2014, from: <http://www.plasticsurgery.org/news/plastic-surgery-statistics/2013.html>
- American Society of Plastic Surgeons (ASPS). (2014). *Cosmetic surgery*. Retrieved: May 10, 2014, from: <http://www.plasticsurgery.org/cosmetic-procedures.html>
- Awakening News Networks. (2013, August 16). 變臉風潮夯 專家：整型會成癮 [The trend for transforming face, experts: addicted to plastic surgeries] . Retrieved: May 8, 2014 from: <http://tw.news.yahoo.com/變臉風潮夯-專家-整型會成癮-035400245.html>
- Bartky, Sandra Lee. (1990). *Femininity and domination: Studies in the phenomenology of oppression*. New York: Routledge.
- Blum, Virginia L. (2003). *Flesh wounds: The culture of cosmetic surgery*. Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.
- Bordo, Susan. (2003). *Unbearable weight: Feminism, Western culture, and the body*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. (1984). *Distinction: A social critique of the judgment of taste*. London: Routledge.

- Brooks, Abigail. (2004). "Under the knife and proud of it": An analysis of the normalization of cosmetic surgery. *Critical Sociology*, 30(2), 207- 239.
- Brumberg, Joan Jacobs. (1997). *The body project: An intimate history of American girls*. New York: Random House.
- Butler, Judith. (1999). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Chisholm, Patricia; Driedger, Sharon Doyle & Chidley, Joe. (1996, July 8). The body builder. *Maclean's*, 109, 36- 41.
- Clarke, Laura Hurd; Repta, Robin & Griffin, Meridith. (2007). Non-surgical cosmetic procedures: Older women's perceptions and experiences. *Journal of Women & Aging*, 19(3/4), 69-87.
- Davis, Kathy. (1991). Remaking the she-devil: A critical look feminist approach to beauty. *Hypatia*, 6, 20-43.
- Davis, Kathy. (1995). *Reshaping the female body: The dilemma of cosmetic surgery*. New York: Routledge.
- Davis, Kathy. (1997). 'My body in my art': Cosmetic surgery as Feminist utopia? *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 4, 23- 37.
- Davis, Kathy. (2003). *Dubious equalities and embodied difference: Cultural studies on cosmetic surgery*. New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Dull, Diana & West, Candace. (1991). Accounting for cosmetic surgery: The accomplishment of gender. *Social Problems*, 38, 54- 70.
- Fallon, April. (1990). Culture in the mirror: Socio-cultural determinants of body image. In Thomas F. Cash & Thomas Pruzinsky (Eds.), *Body images: Development, deviance, and changes* (pp. 80- 109). New York: The Guilford Press.
- Figuroa, Cynthia. (2003). Self-esteem and cosmetic surgery: Is there a relationship between the two? *Plastic Surgical Nursing*, 23, 21-24.
- Fraser, Suzanne. (2003). *Cosmetic surgery, gender, and culture*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Freedman, Rita. (1986). *Beauty bound*. Lexington, M.A.: D.C. Heath.
- Gillespie, Rosemary. (1996). Women, the body and brand extension in medicine: Cosmetic surgery and the paradox of choice. *Women and Health*, 24, 69-83.
- Gilman, Sander L. (1999). *Making the body beautiful: A cultural history of aesthetic surgery*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Gimlin, Debra L. (2002). *Body work: Beauty and self-image in American Culture*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.
- Hansen, Anders. (1998). Media audiences: Focus group interviewing. In Hansen, Anders, Cottle, Simon, Negrine, Ralph and Newbold, Chris. (Eds.) *Mass communication research methods* (pp. 257- 287). Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Hesse-Biber, Sahrlene & Leavy, Patricia. (2011). *The practice of qualitative research (Second edition)*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Huang, Man Ying (黃曼瑩). (2010, July 28). 台灣醫美市場年600億, 微整男女大不同[Six billion for the cosmeceutical market in Taiwan, different micro-plastic surgery between men and women]. Retrieved March 31, 2014 from <http://health.chinatimes.com/contents.aspx?cid=2,20&id=11119>

- International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (ISAPS). (2011). *ISAPS Global Statistics*. Retrieved January 10, 2014, from <http://www.isaps.org/press-center/isaps-global-statistics>.
- Jhou, Yi Sin (周以欣) & Wang, Ya Jhu (王雅筑). (2011, May 27). 學生成消費主力, 最愛治青春痘 [Students the main consumer love the pimple treatment]. Retrieved September 21, 2013 from http://www.uonline.nccu.edu.tw/index_content.asp?sn=0&an=10757
- Kilbourne, Jean. (1995). Beauty and the beast of advertising. In Dines, Gail. & Humez, Jean M. (Eds.), *Gender, race, and class in media: A text reader* (pp.121- 125). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Kirkland, Anna & Tong, Rosemarie. (1996). Working within contradiction: The possibility of feminist cosmetic surgery. *The Journal of Clinical Ethics*, 7(2), 151- 159.
- Krueger, Richard A. & Casey, Mary Anne. (2009). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research (4th ed.)*. California: Sage Publication , Inc.
- Malhotra, Naresh K. & Birks, David F. (2007). *Marketing research: An applied approach (3rd ed.)*. New York: Financial Times Prentice Hall.
- Ministry of Health and Welfare. (2014). Retrieved May 29, 2014 from <http://www.mohw.gov.tw/CHT/Ministry/Index.aspx>
- Montell, Gabriela. (2003). Do good looks equal good evaluations? *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved May 20, 2014 from <http://chronicle.com/>
- Morgan, Kathryn Pauly. (1991). Women and the knife: Cosmetic surgery and the colonization of women's bodies. *Hypatia*, 6(3), 25-53.
- Muise, Amy & Desmarais, Serge. (2010). Women's perceptions and use of "anti-ageing" products. *Sex Roles*, 63, 126- 137.
- Negrin, Llewellyn. (2002). Cosmetic surgery and the eclipse of identity. *Body & Society*, 8(4), 21-42.
- Peiss, Kathy. (1996). Making up, making over: Cosmetics, consumer culture, and women's identity. In Grazia, Victproa de & Furlough, Ellen (Eds.), *The sex of things: Gender and consumption in historical perspective* (pp. 311-336). Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Shields, Vickie Rutledge & Heinecken, Dawn. (2002). *Measuring up: How advertising affects self-image*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Taylor, Steven J. & Bogdan, Robert. (1998). *Introduction to qualitative research methods (3rd ed.)*. Toronto, ON: Wiley and Sons.
- Uho News. (2011, June 29). 聚左旋乳酸療程經美國FDA核可經實證的安全性才能美的安心 [3D-PLLA approved by FDA in the USA and evidenced of the safety, then be beautiful without worry]. Retrieved October 28, 2013 from <http://www.uho.com.tw/hotnews.asp?aid=11006>
- Wolf, Naomi. (1991). *The Beauty Myth: How images of beauty are used against women*. London: Vintage.
- Woodstock, Louise. (2001). Skin deep, soul deep: Mass mediating cosmetic surgery in popular magazines, 1968-1988. *Communication Review*, 4, 421-443.
- Yahoo News. (2011, November 22). 愛美明星臉！ 整形偏愛隋棠鼻 [Obsessed with the celebrities' faces, preference for Suei Tang's nose]. Retrieved March 20, 2014 from <https://tw.news.yahoo.com/%E6%84%9B%E7%BE%8E%E6%98%8E%E6%98%9F%E8%87%89-%E6%95%B4%E5%BD%A2%E5%81%8F%E6%84%9B%E9%9A%8B%E6%A3%A0%E9%BC%BB-073510574.html>

Author Note

Jen-Yi Chen is an Assistant Professor of the Department of Foreign Languages at Fooyin University in Taiwan, where she is also Past Director of the Department of Foreign Languages. She is currently working on projects concerned with men's experiences with minimally-invasive cosmetic procedures and the body. Her research interests include gender and the body, advertising culture, science communication and qualitative methodology.

This paper was presented in its earlier form at the 20th IAICS International Conference held at the University of Rhode Island, USA, from July 31st to August 3rd, 2014. This research was supported by Ministry of Science and Technology, Number 103-2914-I-242-001-A1. The author would like to thank all of the female students who participated in the study of their gift of time and their personal reflections.

The author also wishes to express her appreciation to the anonymous reviewers of this paper for their constructive and insightful suggestions.