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**LOCUS OF CONTROL AND SOCIAL DESIRABILITY AT  
WOMEN WITH PLASTIC SURGERY**

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**Abstract**

Through this paper we aim to study certain psychological variables with an extremely important role in determining the decision of young women to resort to invasive or non-invasive aesthetic interventions. Nowadays, with the evolution of technology, the access to all kind of social media platforms, represents the promotion of a specific image, of a model of beauty which has a strong impact on young people, as these models do not have a correspondent in real life. The promotion of a certain body image, obtained through aesthetic procedures, doubled by the using of filters, or programs to edit photos or even filmed images, create a certain standard of beauty, which is associated with a beautiful life and success. Such an unrealistic standard of beauty represents a strong reason especially for young people to develop a negative body image and also a negative self-image. In reality, this is not the case at all, and precisely for these reasons in considerations in this paper we wanted to determine the role of the perception of control along with the tendency towards social desirability, in determining a positive self-esteem in young women who have aesthetic interventions, as we consider self-esteem an important predictor for general well-being at young women, and show that these women are suffering due to the psychological pressure which in turn could affect their optimal functioning in society and result in poor quality of life in terms of, and not limited to life enjoyment.

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## 1. Introduction

In the last two decades there has been a significant increase in the number of aesthetic interventions (invasive and non-invasive) that both women and men decide to do. This avalanche increase in the demand for aesthetic surgery turns, of course, into a psycho-social phenomenon with profound implications at the psychological level (Diener, Heintzelman et al., 2017). Beyond the psychological aspects that underlie the decision to make interventions of this type, there are also social factors - stereotypes related to beauty, or myths about beauty, and last but not least aspects related to the area of psychopathology such as anxiety, depression, dysmorphic disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder (Diener, Diener et al., 2018). Aesthetic surgery is addressed primarily to people who want to improve their aesthetic appearance, especially those who either have certain hereditary defects or who have suffered certain traumas, and then to those who want to alleviate the natural aging process, and, today, most frequently address those people who, under the influence of social factors and pressures of the media want to achieve a certain "ideal" of beauty and physical attractiveness (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2008).

### 1.1. Locus of control

The internal location of control is the belief that reinforcements are under his own control – the person can control the results/effects of his behaviours. People with external localization of control, attributing to external factors the reinforcements for their behaviours, tend to "let themselves in the will of fate", not to make effort to improve their situation or performances (Groth et al., 2019).

The external location of control is the belief that one's own results/behaviours depend/are controlled by others (people from the close environment or society as a whole). People with internal location of control consider themselves responsible for what happens to them, they are less influenced, more confident in their own capacities. Unlike people with external location of control, who are more dependent on the outside, people with internal localization of control have a greater openness to others, interacting with them from a position of independence. Among them, the frequency of neurotics is much lower than in the first category.

It can also be considered a personality trait. In the psychology of personality, locus of control refers to the extent to which individuals believe that they can control the events that affect them. People with a strong internal locus of control believe that the events in their lives come mainly from their own actions (Krampe et al., 2021). People who have an internal locus of control believe that the results of their actions are the results of their own abilities and believe that their hard work would lead them to positive results. They also believe that each action has its consequences, which makes them accept that things happen and depend on them, whether they want to have control over it or not.- the externals attribute the results of events to external circumstances. People with an external locus tend to believe that the things that happen in their lives are out of their control, and even that their actions are a result of external factors such as fate, luck, strong influence, others.

## 1.2. Social desirability

Social desirability is the tenderness of an individual to succeed in a favorable light in the face of other people in order to hide certain defects or to exaggerate certain qualities (Chelcea et al., 2004). Social desirability as a personality trait refers to those behaviours acted or sustained by people to make a good impression about them and the social approval need refers to giving a desirable response from a cultural point of view. In recent years, social desirability has been conceptualised as having two compositions: the deception of self and the management of impression. By the fact that the compositional concept could be sanctified separately, it was possible to also define this vast phenomenon of social desirability. The social desirability is defined as a concept which focuses on the idea that people adapt to the function of the environment, the presence of some persons in accordance with the motivations of a social group. It's basically the ability of individuals to make them like in a social group. The current society brings to promotion models of beauty that have little correspondent in reality and then based on social pressure, social comparison, great differences between the real self and the ideal self, young women resort to a wide range of inventions and aesthetic procedures meant to bring them the much desired psychological state of well-being, characterized by a positive self-image or positive self-esteem.

## 1.3. Self-esteem

Self-esteem is a psychological construct approached by the authors of different schools as a general or specific way of relating to oneself, with broad implications on the personality, related to self-image, self-confidence and self-knowledge (Brunet et al., 2010). A person with high self-esteem perceives himself as a valuable being, is satisfied with himself and respects himself, knowing and accepting at the same time his flaws or weaknesses, the vulnerabilities that he has (Aknin et al., 2020).

The positive feelings that such a person has towards himself are based on faith in an intrinsic personal value beyond an event, a particular situation or a failure suffered (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2008). According to studies and research, the person with high self-esteem will be able in addition to the person with low self-esteem to learn from mistakes, develop and evolve (Anglim et al., 2020). This does not mean that she does not feel a failure as unpleasant, but she will not let a particular event affect her entire image of herself, it will not affect her confidence in her abilities to the same extent on future successes and it will not be dominated by negative feelings about failure in all areas of life other than those related to failure (Bucchianeri et al., 2013).

## 2. Problem Statement

Self-esteem is based on a perception and self-assessment of oneself, these constructs referring to what is known as self-image.

In the contemporary society there is an impressive increase in the phenomenon of aesthetic surgery, more and more women resorting to these interventions in order to obtain an ideal of beauty and attractiveness (Mitrofan et al., 2016). It is precisely from this reality that we propose that through the present study we make an analysis of how the localization of internal or external control determines social

desirability, along with self-esteem. In young women who have resorted to aesthetic interventions either invasive or non-invasive.

The consumerism general culture, nowadays establishes new standards of beauty, like the ideal body image very popular especially in the virtual field. So there are many differences between the reality, and the model promoted by the virtual environment or press (Diener, Seligman, et al., 2018). These aspects are more important for teenagers, who are in special stadium of development as they have to discover their identity (Brown & Dittmar, 2005). The literature shows us that the body image is very strong connected with the concepts of self image and self esteem (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002a).

Nowadays we can see the increasing number of aesthetic interventions, most of them being performed by young women who want to be closer to the ideal image of beauty, because this ideal image was internalised and also was established through social comparison. In this way, young women seek for attention and social approval (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2002b).

We want to determine these relationships between the proposed variables because we started from the idea that despite the aesthetic interventions women had, the satisfaction with the body scheme is not optimized in the long term, since the modification of a certain part of the body scheme does not influence the perception of the body scheme in its entirety, this being an accumulation of psychological and physical characteristics. Precisely because young women who have resorted to aesthetic interventions, we consider that they are more vulnerable from an affective point of view and at the level of the relationships they develop (Diener, Lucas et al., 2018).

### **3. Research Questions**

The first question of the research is whether between the chosen variables, namely the internal control locus, the external control locus there are certain correlations, which will help us determine the regression analysis model; Another question is whether the model proposed by us, for regression analysis, respectively, the locus of internal and external control, along with the tendency towards social desirability, determines the level of self-esteem in young women who have invasive and non-invasive aesthetic surgeries.

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

Through this work I wanted to operationalize the concepts of self-esteem, social desirability, and locus of control;

- i. Determination of possible relationships between the studied variables;
- ii. Identification of appropriate tools for the evaluation of the chosen variables;
- iii. Testing a prediction model for self-esteem in the case of women who have aesthetic interventions.

### **5. Research Methods**

In order to achieve the objectives, we used the psychometric method as a research method. The variables studied were:

1. Locus of control is characterized by the person's perception of the force or forces that in turn determine the rewards or punishments corresponding to certain behaviors performed. It is also represented by the extent to which the person thinks that he can manipulate the events that influence his life, so those who believe that they control the source of rewards or punishments have a place of internal control, these being specified by their own behavior, and those who believe that the rewards and punishments cannot control them themselves, these being determined by others, destiny or chances, have the locus of external control. To determine the location of the control, we used the Multidimensional measure of children's perceptions of control (SMPCC).

2. Self-image is a complex structure and refers to how we perceive our different physical, emotional, cognitive, social, spiritual characteristics. The value dimension of self-image is self-esteem, or how much the person appreciates himself. In this paper, self-esteem was operationalized through the Rosenberg scale.

3. Social desirability - represents the need to respond in a certain way to the people in such a way as to be put in an acceptable social light. In this paper, this variable has been operationalized through the Social Sustainability Scale.

Participants: We had a number of 224 female subjects with ages between 21-38 years, all romanian women who have invasive or non-invasive plastic surgeries.

## 6. Findings

**Table 1.** Descriptives statistics for the variables-self-esteem, social desirability, intern locus of control and extern locus of control

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
self esteem	27.1964	6.30302	224
Social desirability	17.3750	6.00616	224
Locus intern	29.7143	12.58045	224
Locus extern	25.8036	13.66796	224

**Table 2.** Correlations between self-esteem, social desirability, intern locus of control and extern locus of control

		self esteem	Social desirability	Locus intern	Locus extern
Pearson Correlation	self esteem	1.000	-.815	.729	-.693
	Social desirability	-.815	1.000	-.570	.602
	Locus intern	.729	-.570	1.000	-.747
	Locus extern	-.693	.602	-.747	1.000
Sig. (1-tailed)	self esteem	.	.000	.000	.000
	Social desirability	.000	.	.000	.000
	Locus intern	.000	.000	.	.000
	Locus extern	.000	.000	.000	.
N	self esteem	224	224	224	224
	Social desirability	224	224	224	224

Locus intern	224	224	224	224
Locus extern	224	224	224	224

Table 2 shows us significant correlation between:

- i. self-esteem and social desirability, where the coefficient of correlation  $r = -0,81$ ,  $\text{sig} < 0,01$ , which is a strong negative correlation,
- ii. self-esteem and intern locus of control, where the coefficient of correlation  $r = 0,72$ ,  $\text{sig} < 0,01$ , which is a strong positive correlation,
- iii. self-esteem and extern locus of control, where the coefficient of correlation  $r = -0,69$ ,  $\text{sig} < 0,01$ , which is a strong negative correlation.

We obtained strong negative correlations between the level of self-esteem and the level of social desirability, which show us that if the females we evaluated have a low self-esteem, their level of social desirability is high. We also obtained strong negative correlations between self-esteem and extern locus of control, which show us that the higher the extern localization of control is the lower the self-esteem's level is. A positive correlation we obtained between the self-esteem level and the intern localization of control.

**Table 3.** Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.879 <sup>a</sup>	.772	.769	3.02799	.772	248.752	3	220	.000

Table 3 shows us that the predictors – constant, locus of control and social desirability explain 87% of the variance of the variable criterion, represented by self-esteem,  $\text{sig} < 0,01$ . Table 4 also shows us the ANOVA results, where  $F = 248,752$ ,  $\text{sig} < 0$ .

**Table 4.** ANOVA<sup>b</sup>

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1 Regression	6842.235	3	2280.745	248.752	.000 <sup>a</sup>
1 Residual	2017.122	220	9.169		
Total	8859.357	223			

a. Predictors: (Constant), social desirability, Locus intern, Locus extern

b. Dependent Variable: self esteem

**Table 5.** Coefficients<sup>a</sup>

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	33.925	1.428		23.765	.000
1 Social desirability	-.589	.043	-.562	-13.573	.000
Locus intern	.163	.025	.325	6.550	.000

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Locus extern	-.052	.024	-.112	-2.195	.029
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a. Dependent Variable: self esteem

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Table 5 shows us we may see the unstandardized coefficients, which finally show us that the constant, with the locus of control and social desirability are the predictors for the level of self-esteem at the subjects evaluated, sig<0,01.

The regression analysis showed us that the constant, near locus of control and social desirability explain 87% of the variance of the dependent variable, represented by self-esteem.

## 7. Conclusions

Following the realization of this study, although we cannot generalize the data at the level of the population given the limited number of subjects, we can say that although, there are young women who, in the desire to achieve certain standards of beauty, resort to aesthetic surgery, unfortunately that the interventions do not ensure an improvement of the self-image and respectively an increase in self-esteem. Consequently, we wanted to test to what extent the tendency towards social desirability and the locus of control are predictors for the self-esteem of young women who have resorted to aesthetic interventions. After analyzing the results, we concluded by the fact that a proportion of 87% of the self-esteem variant is explained by the location of the control and the tendency towards social desirability, which shows us that the pressure of social models and beauty standards is very high, which also translates into resorting to aesthetic interventions.

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