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PARTICULARITIES OF SELF-IMAGE IN INDIVIDUALS UNDERGOING AESTHETIC INTERVENTIONS

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In the context of sociocultural pressures and the promotion of beauty standards, aesthetic interventions influence the dynamics of self-image and self-appraisal. The study investigates the particularities of self-image in individuals who underwent either plastic surgical interventions or minimally invasive procedures. The results highlight significant differences between the groups: participants who opted for minimally invasive procedures present higher levels of self-image and self-appraisal compared to those who underwent plastic surgeries. In the case of plastic interventions, discrepancies emerge between the actual self and the ideal self, particularly on the authoritarian, aggressive, and selfish dimensions, suggesting a tendency to reduce these traits at the ideal level. The conclusions indicate that the type of aesthetic intervention is differentially associated with the level of self-image, self-appraisal, and the congruence between the actual self and the ideal self.

Keywords: *self-image, self-appraisal, plastic surgeries, minimally invasive procedures, actual self, ideal self.*

PARTICULARITĂȚI ALE IMAGINII DE SINE LA PERSOANELE CU INTERVENȚII ESTETICE

În contextul presiunilor socioculturale și al promovării standardelor de frumusețe, intervențiile estetice influențează dinamica imaginii de sine și a autoaprecierii. Studiul investighează particularitățile imaginii de sine la persoanele care au recurs fie la intervenții chirurgicale plastice, fie la proceduri minim invazive. Rezultatele evidențiază diferențe semnificative între grupuri: participanții care au optat pentru proceduri minim invazive prezintă niveluri mai ridicate ale imaginii de sine și ale autoaprecierii comparativ cu cei care au efectuat intervenții chirurgicale plastice. În cazul intervențiilor plastice, apar discrepanțe între eul real și eul ideal, în special pe dimensiunile autoritară, agresivă și egoistă, sugerând o tendință de reducere a acestor trăsături la nivelul eului ideal. Concluziile indică faptul că tipul intervenției estetice este asociat diferențiat cu nivelul imaginii de sine, al autoaprecierii și cu gradul de congruență dintre eul real și eul ideal.

Cuvinte-cheie: *imagine de sine, autoapreciere, intervenții chirurgicale plastice, proceduri minim invazive, eul real, eul ideal.*

Introduction

Self-image represents a fundamental psychological construct that is highly sensitive to contextual and sociocultural influences in contemporary society. As an individual's personal values, social norms, and cognitive schemas evolve, continuous exposure to external evaluations and the pervasive effects of social media may lead to disturbances in self-concept, identity coherence, and authenticity of the individual's self-perception.

An analysis of statistics from several countries, including the United States, Turkey, and the United Kingdom, indicates that women constitute the majority of patients undergoing aesthetic interventions, whereas men resort to plastic surgery much less frequently. The primary motivations for these individuals include dissatisfaction with certain aspects of their own body, as well as the influence of beauty models and standards constantly promoted on social media platforms [1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8].

Zuckerman D. and Abraham A. emphasize that aesthetic surgical interventions are not exclusively performed by women or men, but also by adolescents. In recent decades, the number of adolescents undergoing such procedures has increased significantly, with the most common being rhinoplasty, abdominoplasty, otoplasty, liposuction, chin augmentation, and breast augmentation. The authors highlight the benefits of these interventions, addressing both their advantages and potential disadvantages [8].

At the same time, there is a consistent annual increase in the number of individuals seeking these procedures. Ideally, the primary motivation should be the correction of a real, existing physical imperfection. However, due to the excessive promotion of these interventions and their perception as a "solution" for enhancing self-image and achieving self-acceptance, the distinction between procedures that are genuinely necessary and those performed for social or emotional reasons is often blurred, potentially impacting the individual's overall well-being.

When an individual undergoes aesthetic interventions, multiple dimensions of self-image are involved. Some individuals choose these procedures due to low self-appraisal or self-esteem, or because they strive to attain a personally constructed ideal. People are often preoccupied with their appearance, seeking to impress others and achieve the "best version" of themselves. In pursuit of this ideal, they may lose sight of their authentic identity, which is the foundation of personal satisfaction and self-acceptance. In everyday situations, a simple glance in the mirror may highlight perceived imperfections, especially for individuals who are continuously oriented toward self-modification, and these perceived flaws often motivate recourse to surgical or minimally invasive aesthetic procedures.

Research indicates that these interventions can have positive effects on self-image, contributing to the optimization of body image and enhancing overall quality of life. Following certain procedures, patients report improved emotional well-being, greater appreciation of their own body, and more affectionate self-perception. For instance, women who have undergone mastectomy due to breast cancer and subsequently received breast reconstruction reported significantly higher satisfaction with their body image compared to preoperative levels [6].

The literature in plastic surgery also highlights several challenges faced by individuals opting for these interventions [1, 2, 4, 5, 6]. Prior to surgery, many patients experience reduced self-esteem, difficulties in accepting their body image, and various psychological conditions or disorders, such as depression, anxiety, or a sense of identity loss. Following the procedures, individuals' attitudes and perceptions of their bodies often change significantly: they become more confident, admire their bodies, and demonstrate greater openness to social interactions, even if they had previously avoided contact with others due to dissatisfaction with their physical appearance.

Various studies highlight multiple factors influencing the decision to undergo aesthetic interventions, with social media being a major contributor. In the 21st century, digital applications have undergone significant transformations, becoming more advanced and accessible for individuals seeking to modify certain aspects of their bodies. When viewing these images, individuals tend to focus on their own perceived flaws, often engaging in social comparison. Evidence regarding the impact of social media on the decision to pursue aesthetic procedures varies; however, most surgeons agree that both social media and marketing strategies can increase patient volume. The study conducted by Sorice C. and colleagues demonstrated that Facebook has the greatest influence on patients, followed by YouTube and Instagram [7]. Moreover, societal pressure to conform to specific beauty standards can substantially reduce self-image and self-acceptance. Certain standards are unrealistic and may have negative effects on mental health and overall well-being.

Another factor contributing to the decision to undergo aesthetic interventions is the ongoing advancement of medical technology. Innovations allow for procedures to be performed with precision, using safe and biocompatible materials, digital simulations enabling patients to visualize results prior to the intervention, and rapid recovery times post-procedure, all of which enhance patient confidence and increase willingness to undergo these interventions.

Consequently, the decision to modify one's body should be deliberate, carefully considered, and authentically desired by the individual, to prevent choices driven by low self-esteem or by attempts to correct non-existent defects.

Regarding self-image, a key indicator of a healthy self-concept is authenticity. Maintaining authenticity is challenging in a society dominated by beauty standards and social judgment. Nevertheless, individuals who preserve their authenticity are valued, and discovering one's own identity beyond socially imposed norms becomes essential. While external influences are strong, each individual possesses unique qualities that contribute to their distinct beauty.

Research methodology

The aim of the present study is to investigate the particularities of self-image in individuals who have undergone aesthetic interventions.

The sample consisted of 40 participants, of whom 20 had undergone plastic surgeries and 20 had received minimally invasive aesthetic procedures. The participants are clients of specialized clinics in the Republic of Moldova. All subjects were informed about the purpose of the study, the manner in which the collected data would be used, and the strict confidentiality of their personal information. The sample included 90% women and 10% men.

Figure 1 illustrates the procedures to which the clinic participants have resorted.

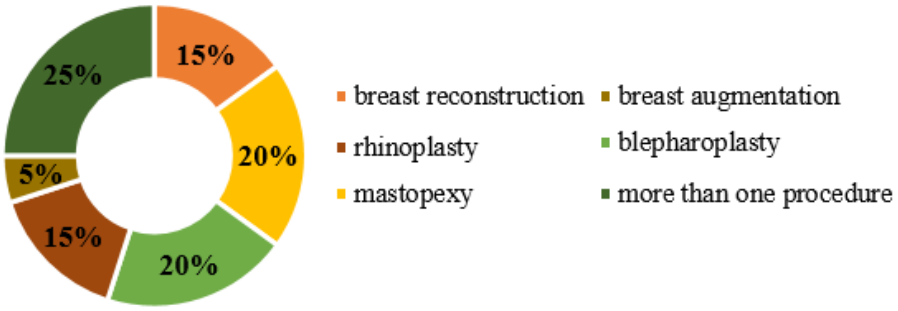


Fig. 1. Percentage distribution of types of plastic surgery

According to Figure 1, the majority of clinic patients underwent more than one procedure simultaneously (25%), while 20% opted for mastopexy and blepharoplasty. Furthermore, it can be observed that the least frequently performed procedure was breast augmentation (5%).

In Figure 2, the procedures performed concurrently on individual subjects are analyzed.

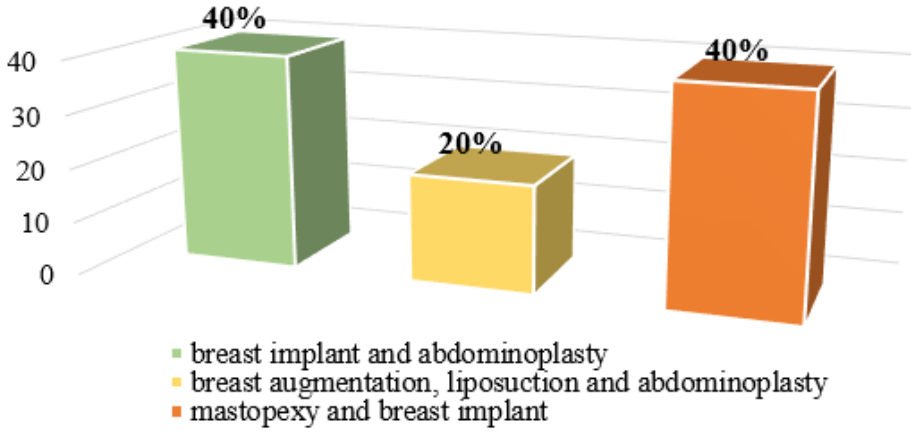


Fig. 2. Distribution by the number of plastic surgeries performed

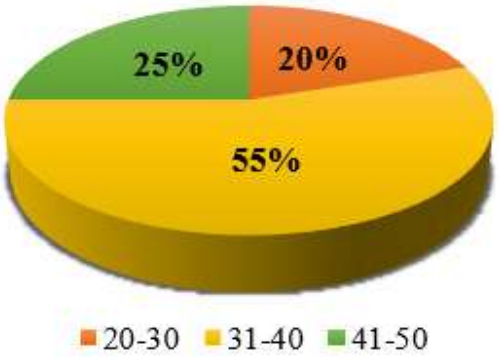


Fig. 3. Age distribution of individuals who underwent plastic surgeries

Analyzing the participants who underwent more than one procedure simultaneously, according to Figure 2, 40% had two procedures performed at the same time: breast implant and abdominoplasty, or mastopexy and breast implant. Meanwhile, 20% underwent three procedures simultaneously: breast augmentation, liposuction, and abdominoplasty.

In Figure 3, the study participants are distributed according to age. From Figure 3, it can be observed that the individuals who underwent plastic surgeries are between 20 and 50 years old, with 55% of them aged between 31 and 40.

In order to achieve the proposed aim, the following hypotheses were developed:

1. There are differences in self-appraisal between individuals who have undergone plastic surgeries and those who have undergone minimally invasive aesthetic procedures.
2. There are differences in the perception of the actual self and the ideal self between individuals who have undergone plastic surgeries and minimally invasive aesthetic procedures.

To test the hypothesis of the proposed scientific study, a descriptive research design was implemented. In order to determine the particularities of self-image among individuals who have undergone aesthetic interventions, the following psychodiagnostic methods were applied: Berger's Self-Acceptance Scale, the test "How Strong Is Your Self-Image" by N. Mitrofan, and "Diagnosis of Interpersonal Relations" by T. Leary, G. Leforge, R. Sazek.

Results and Discussion

According to the empirical approach, the study participants were administered the test "How Strong Is Your Self-Image" by N. Mitrofan. The results are illustrated in Figure 4.

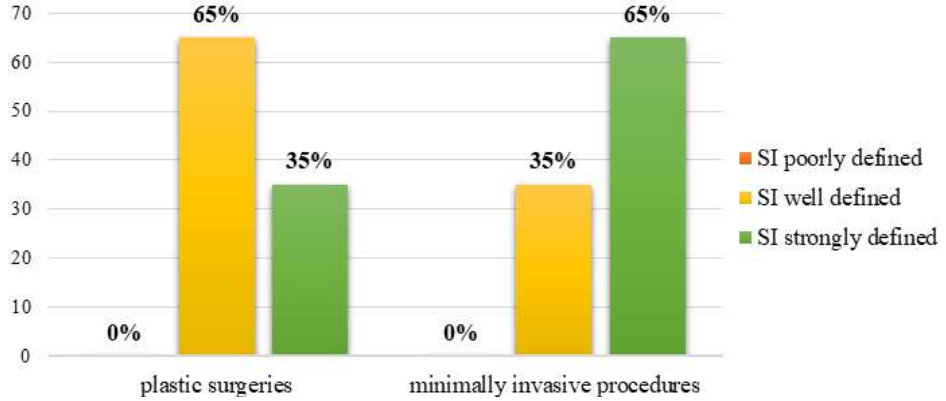


Fig. 4. Self-image level among individuals who underwent plastic surgeries and minimally invasive procedures

Analyzing Figure 4, it was determined that 65% of individuals who underwent plastic surgeries have a well-defined self-image, whereas 65% of individuals who underwent minimally invasive procedures have a strongly defined self-image. This suggests that individuals who opt for minimally invasive aesthetic interventions tend to have a stronger self-image compared to those who undergo plastic surgeries. When a person decides to make a change through a surgical procedure, time takes on a particular significance, as recovery following such an intervention can last several months.

Subsequently, we aimed to determine whether there are differences in the level of self-image between individuals who underwent plastic surgeries and those who opted for minimally invasive procedures. To assess the statistical significance of these data, an independent samples t-test was applied. Table 1 is presented below.

Table 1. Comparison of self-image according to the type of intervention performed

	Plastic surgeries	**Minimally invasive procedures**	**t**	**df**	**p**
Self-image	m=112,75	m=131,95	4,330	38	0,000

Analysis of the data in Table 1 reveals a significant difference in self-image levels between individuals who underwent plastic surgeries (m = 112.75) and those who underwent minimally invasive procedures (m = 131.95), t = 4.330, df = 38, p < 0.001. These findings suggest that individuals who underwent minimally invasive aesthetic interventions exhibit higher levels of self-image compared to subjects who opted for plastic surgeries.

A study conducted in Italy highlighted the importance of the preoperative period, indicating that postoperative body satisfaction is influenced by the severity of body dissatisfaction experienced prior to the procedure: the higher the severity of dissatisfaction, the lower the postoperative satisfaction.

Improvement in discomfort related to body image is not determined by the specific type of intervention, but rather by the intensity of dissatisfaction with one's own image. Furthermore, the study emphasizes the significance of the postoperative period, noting that individuals with body image disturbances may continue to experience dissatisfaction with their appearance even 12 months after the intervention [4].

To determine the level of self-appraisal in individuals who have undergone aesthetic interventions, Berger's Self-Acceptance Scale was applied. The results obtained from the participants are illustrated in Figure 5.

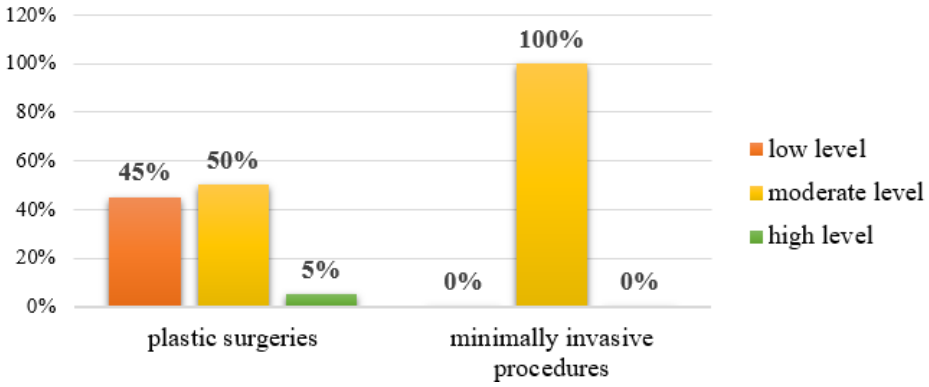


Fig. 5. Level of self-appraisal in individuals who underwent aesthetic interventions

From Figure 5, it can be observed that all 20 participants who underwent minimally invasive procedures have a medium level of self-appraisal, suggesting that these individuals generally accept themselves, although they may sometimes encounter difficulties in managing their own thoughts, states, and emotions. A medium level of self-appraisal indicates a balanced and realistic perception of oneself as well as of one's own value.

A noticeable difference is that among individuals who underwent plastic surgeries, 5% exhibit a high level of self-appraisal, meaning that these individuals have confidence in their abilities, feel valuable, accept both praise and criticism, and are aware of both the positive and negative aspects of themselves. Nevertheless, 45% of participants who underwent plastic surgeries display a low level of self-appraisal, which may have influenced their decision to undergo such interventions.

Subsequently, we aimed to examine potential discrepancies in the level of self-appraisal between individuals who underwent minimally invasive procedures and those who underwent plastic surgeries. To determine statistical significance, an independent samples t-test was applied. Table 2 is presented below.

Table 2. Comparison of self-appraisal according to the type of intervention

	Plastic surgeries	Minimally invasive surgery	t	df	p
Self-appraisal	m=22,35	m=27,20	2,791	38	0,008

The analysis of the results obtained using an independent samples t-test revealed a significant difference in self-appraisal between individuals who underwent plastic surgeries (m = 22.35) and those who underwent minimally invasive procedures (m = 27.20), t = 2.791, df = 38, p = 0.008. These findings indicate that individuals who underwent minimally invasive procedures exhibit higher levels of self-appraisal compared to those who opted for plastic surgeries.

A study conducted at Temple University, USA, reported that between 5% and 15% of individuals who undergo plastic surgeries have low self-image levels and suffer from body dysmorphic disorder. The study also notes that only a small proportion of individuals who undergo such interventions experience a significant improvement in symptoms. These findings support the results of our research, in which 45% of participants who underwent plastic surgeries exhibited a low level of self-image [5].

Subsequently, to identify specific characteristics of self-image, the results obtained from participants according to "Diagnosis of Interpersonal Relations" (the Leary test scales) are presented below.

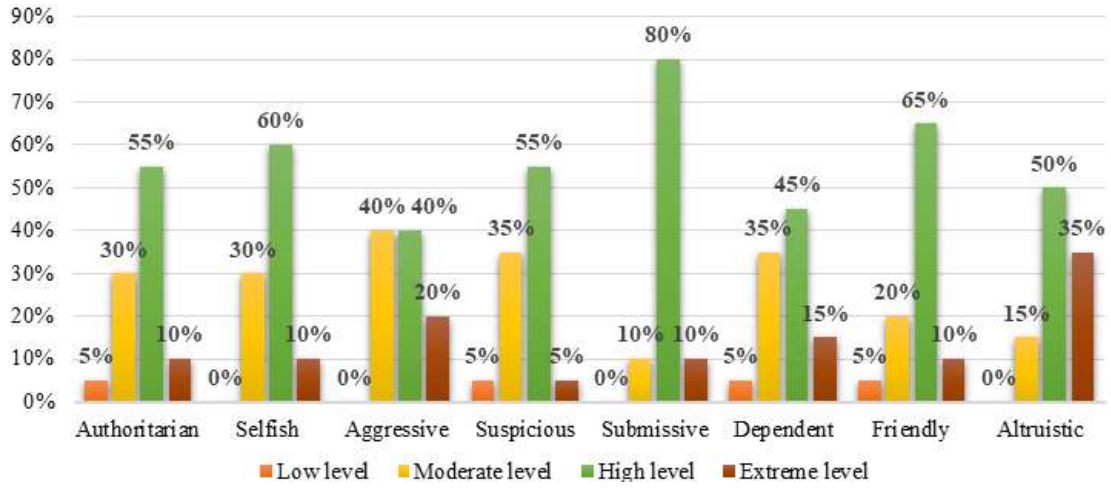


Fig. 6. Perception of the actual self in individuals who underwent minimally invasive aesthetic procedures

Extreme values obtained by individuals who underwent minimally invasive procedures were recorded on the following scales: authoritarian (10%), selfish (10%), aggressive (20%), suspicious (5%), submissive (10%), dependent (15%), friendly (10%), and altruistic (35%). High values were observed on the scales: authoritarian (55%), selfish (60%), aggressive (40%), suspicious (55%), submissive (80%), dependent (45%), friendly (65%), and altruistic (50%). Additionally, these individuals recorded minimum values, up to 5%, on the scales: authoritarian (5%), suspicious (5%), dependent (5%), and friendly (5%). Analysis of the data presented in Figure 6 shows that no participant who underwent minimally invasive procedures obtained a low level on the selfish, aggressive, submissive, or altruistic scales.

The data obtained from individuals who underwent plastic surgeries regarding self-perception, according to the Leary test scales, are illustrated in Figure 7 below.

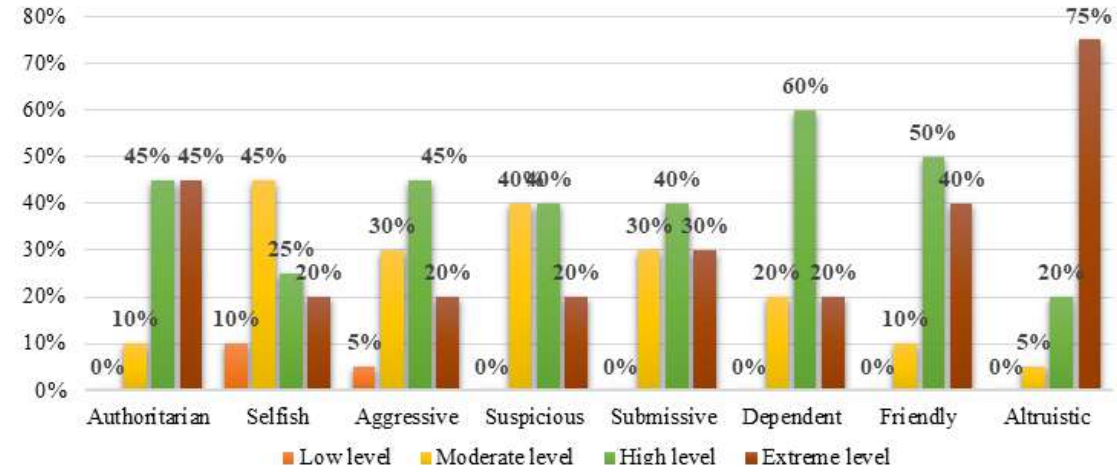


Fig. 7. Perception of the actual self in individuals who underwent plastic surgeries

Analysis of the percentage scores in Figure 7 reveals that the majority of individuals who underwent plastic surgeries obtained high values on the following scales: dependent (60%) and friendly (50%). A considerable number of participants obtained moderate levels on the scales: selfish (45%), aggressive (30%), suspicious (40%), and submissive (30%). Very low scores were recorded on the selfish (10%) and aggressive (5%) scales at the low level. An extreme level was observed on the altruistic scale (75%). No participants obtained low scores on the authoritarian, suspicious, submissive, dependent, friendly, or altruistic scales.

Subsequently, to examine significant differences in the perception of the actual self between individuals who underwent plastic surgeries and those who underwent minimally invasive procedures, an independent

samples t-test was applied. The mean results of self-perception according to the type of aesthetic intervention are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Characteristics of self-perception according to the type of intervention

Leary test scales	Plastic surgeries	Minimally invasive procedures	Test t
Authoritarian	11,80	9,55	t= -2,689, p=,011
Selfish	8,85	10,15	t=1,428, p insignificant
Aggressive	9,50	9,50	t= ,000, p insignificant
Suspicious	10,10	8,70	t= -1,502, p insignificant
Submissive	10,85	10,10	t= -,931, p insignificant
Dependent	10,95	8,95	t= -2,244, p=,031
Friendly	11,70	9,85	t= -2,108, p=,042
Altruistic	13,50	11,65	t= -2,753, p=,009

According to the data presented in the table above, inverse proportional differences are identified on the following scales: authoritarian (plastic surgeries m = 11.80, minimally invasive procedures m = 9.55, t = -2.689, p = 0.011), we can deduce that individuals with plastic surgeries perceive themselves as more authoritarian than those with minimally invasive procedures; dependent (plastic surgeries m = 10.95, minimally invasive procedures m = 8.95, t = -2.244, p = 0.031): individuals with plastic surgeries are more dependent than those with minimally invasive procedures; friendly (plastic surgeries m = 11.70, minimally invasive procedures m = 9.85, t = -2.108, p = 0.042): individuals with plastic surgeries perceive themselves as more friendly and sociable than those with minimally invasive procedures; altruistic (plastic surgeries m = 13.50, minimally invasive procedures m = 11.65, t = -2.753, p = 0.009): participants with plastic surgeries perceive themselves as more responsible toward others than those with minimally invasive procedures.

According to the data presented in Table 3, no differences were observed on the selfish, aggressive, suspicious, and submissive scales.

In order to identify certain characteristics of ideal self-perception, the results obtained by participants according to the Leary test scales are presented below.

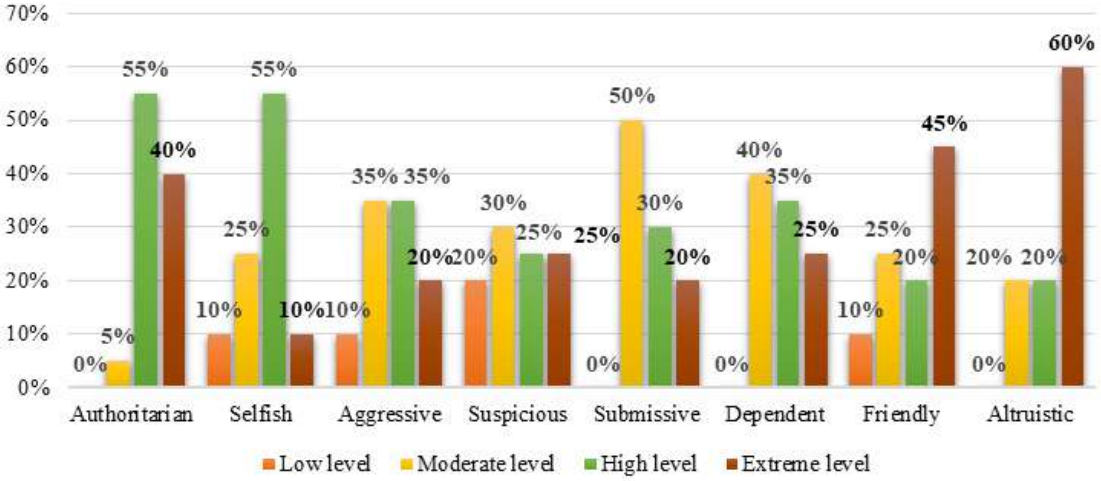


Fig. 8. Perception of the ideal self in individuals who underwent plastic surgeries

The results demonstrate that the majority of individuals who underwent plastic surgeries show high levels on the following scales: authoritarian (55%) and selfish (55%). An extreme level is observed for most participants on the altruistic scale (60%). Moderate percentage values, up to 20%, are identified on the scales: authoritarian (5%) and altruistic (20%). From the presented data, it can be observed that no in-

dividual who underwent plastic surgeries obtained a low level on the authoritarian, submissive, dependent, or altruistic scales. Half of the participants scored 10% on the selfish, aggressive, and friendly scales, and 20% on the suspicious scale.

We continue by presenting the data obtained from individuals who underwent minimally invasive procedures regarding their perception of the ideal self.

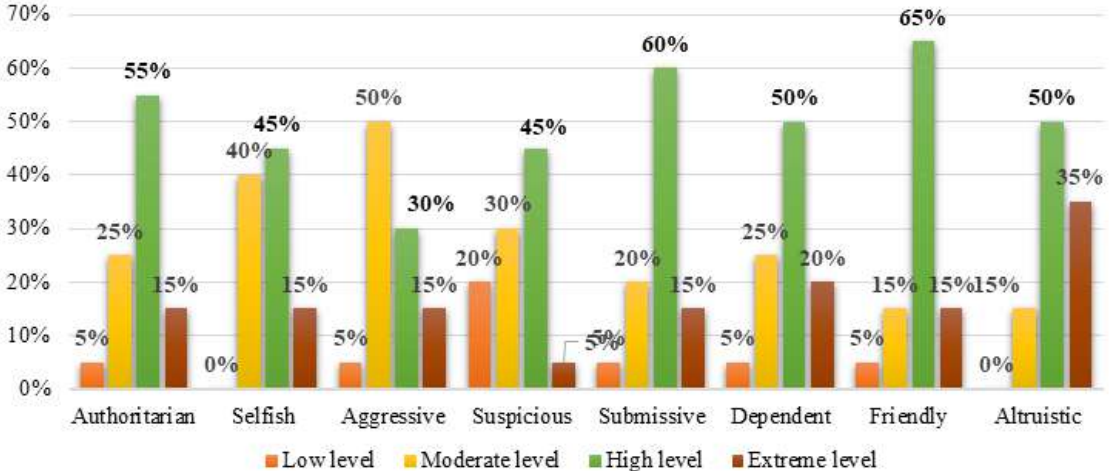


Fig. 9. Perception of the ideal self in individuals who underwent minimally invasive procedures

The results demonstrate that the majority of individuals with minimally invasive procedures show high levels on the following scales: authoritarian (55%), submissive (60%), dependent (50%), friendly (65%), and altruistic (50%). An extreme level was reached on the altruistic scale (35%), and also extreme levels of 15% on the authoritarian, selfish, aggressive, submissive, and friendly scales, and 20% on the dependent scale. Only 5% of participants reached the extreme level on the suspicious scale. Low levels, only 5%, were identified on the authoritarian, aggressive, submissive, dependent, and friendly scales. From the presented data, it can be observed that no individual with minimally invasive procedures obtained a low level on the selfish or altruistic scales.

To examine whether significant differences exist in the perception of the ideal self according to the type of aesthetic intervention, an independent samples t-test was applied.

Table 4. Perception of the ideal self according to the type of intervention

Leary test scales	Plastic surgeries	Minimally invasive procedures	Test t
Authoritarian	m=11,95	m=9,60	t=-2,739,p=0,009
Selfish	m=9,25	m=9,35	t=,102, p insignificant
Aggressive	m=9,00	m=8,10	t=,-747, p insignificant
Suspicious	m=9,40	m=8,75	t=-,693, p insignificant
Submissive	m=9,35	m=9,60	t=-,693 p insignificant
Dependent	m=9,55	m=9,65	t=,237 p insignificant
Friendly	m=12,10	m=11,80	t=-,315 p insignificant
Altruistic	m=10,70	m=10,45	t=-,237 p insignificant

The results allow us to identify significant inverse proportional differences only on the *authoritarian* scale, as follows: plastic surgeries m = 11.95, minimally invasive procedures m = 9.60, t = -2.739, df = 38, p = 0.009. Thus, we can state that individuals who underwent plastic surgeries have a more authoritarian perception of their ideal self compared to those who underwent minimally invasive aesthetic procedures. Those who underwent plastic surgeries perceive their ideal self as more dictatorial, teaching everyone, constantly imposing their own opinion, and exhibiting a dominant and authoritarian character.

To identify differences between the real self and the ideal self in individuals with minimally invasive procedures, an independent samples t-test was applied.

Table 5. Perception of the real self and the ideal self in individuals who underwent minimally invasive procedures

Leary test scales	Real self	Ideal self	Test t
Authoritarian	m=10,15	m=9,35	t=1,013, p insignificant
Selfish	m=9,55	m=9,60	t=-,057, p insignificant
Aggressive	m=9,50	m=8,75	t=,923, p insignificant
Suspicious	m=8,70	m=8,10	t=,656, p insignificant
Submissive	m=10,10	m=9,60	t=,564 p insignificant
Dependent	m=8,95	m=9,65	t=-,813 p insignificant
Friendly	m=9,85	m=10,45	t=-,639, p insignificant
Altruistic	m=11,65	m=11,80	t=-,202, p insignificant

Following the application of the statistical test, we found that there are no significant differences between the real self and the ideal self in individuals who underwent minimally invasive aesthetic procedures. This may be due to the fact that individuals who opted for minimally invasive procedures have a more well-defined self-image and a moderate level of self-esteem.

To examine whether significant differences exist between the real self and the ideal self in individuals who underwent plastic surgeries, an independent samples t-test was applied.

Table 6. Perception of the real self and the ideal self in individuals who underwent plastic surgeries

Leary test scales	Real self	Ideal self	Test t
Authoritarian	m=22,35	m=9,25	t=9,502, p=,000
Selfish	m=112,75	m=11,95	t=25,871, p=,000
Aggressive	m=11,80	m=9,40	t=2,583, p=,014
Suspicious	m=8,85	m=9,00	t=-,123, p insignificant
Submissive	m=9,50	m=9,35	t=,147, p insignificant
Dependent	m=10,10	m=9,55	t=,524, p insignificant
Friendly	m=10,85	m=10,70	t=,146, p insignificant
Altruistic	m=10,95	m=12,10	t=-1,146, p insignificant

Following the application of the independent samples t-test, significant differences were found on the following scales: authoritarian (real self m = 22.35, ideal self m = 9.25, t = 9.502, p = .000), selfish (real self m = 112.75, ideal self m = 11.95, t = 25.871, p = .000), and aggressive (real self m = 11.80, ideal self m = 9.40, t = 2.583, p = .014).

Thus, it can be observed that individuals who underwent plastic surgeries perceive their real self as more authoritarian, aggressive, and selfish, with a predominating desire for these traits to be reduced, the ideal self representing the absence or diminution of these qualities.

Summarizing the results obtained for the real self and the ideal self in individuals with plastic surgeries and minimally invasive procedures, we can conclude that in individuals with minimally invasive procedures, no discrepancies exist between the real self and the ideal self, which may explain why they opt for minimal interventions. In contrast, individuals who underwent plastic surgeries tend to desire to be less aggressive, authoritarian, and selfish, which may drive their choices to undergo drastic changes through surgery and to modify their self-image.

In **conclusion**, the analysis of the study data indicates that most participants present a well-defined or

strongly defined level of self-image. However, significant differences emerge between individuals who underwent plastic surgeries and those who opted for minimally invasive procedures, with the former group exhibiting a lower level of self-image. Similarly, self-esteem assessment reveals that participants who chose minimally invasive procedures demonstrate higher levels of self-appreciation compared to those who underwent plastic surgeries.

Regarding self-perception, individuals who underwent plastic surgeries perceive themselves as more authoritarian, dependent, and anxious than those who opted for minimally invasive interventions. Moreover, the analysis of the ideal self highlights significant differences between the two groups: individuals with plastic surgeries tend to envision an ideal self that is more authoritarian, dictatorial, and dominant, showing a tendency to impose their opinions and guide others' behavior. In contrast, participants who opted for minimally invasive procedures show no discrepancies between their real and ideal self, whereas those with plastic surgeries tend to imagine an ideal self that is less selfish, less authoritarian, and less aggressive, reflecting a conscious desire to reduce these traits in their personality.

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