



Terror Management Theory and its Role in Women's Desires to Meet Cultural Body Standards

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Introduction

- Cosmetic surgery that alters one's body has become one of the most popular type of procedure despite being among the most deadly (American Society of Plastic Surgeons, 2018; Mofid et al., 2017).
- Recently, pressure has been put on women to have curvaceous qualities yet maintain a slim body (Ahern et al., 2011; Roberts & Muta, 2014; Sypeck et al., 2006), which may further push women to seek out aesthetic surgery (Harrison, 2003; Tam, 2013).
- Terror management theory (TMT; Greenberg et al., 2014), which states that humans will cling to their cultural worldviews and bolster their self-esteem to alleviate anxiety about death, may provide an explanation for this.
- One's physical body is a way in which one can guard against death anxiety, but that is only the case if one believes their body aligns with cultural body standards (Goldenberg et al., 2000).
- The current study investigated the impact of the awareness of death (MS; mortality salience) and the curvy body ideal on acceptance for cosmetic surgery among women.
- **Hypothesis:** Women in the condition where death is salient who hold more curvy ideals will show greater acceptance of cosmetic surgery.

Methodology

Participants: There were a total of 29 CSU Channel Islands students who participated in this study. All of the participants consisted of females being that our focus was TMT and cosmetic surgery among women

Independent and Predictor Variables:

- **Mortality salience versus control.** Participants were asked to write about either death or dental pain.
- **Hourglass Body Shape Ideal Scale** assessed internalization of the curvy ideal (Hernandez et al., 2021; $\alpha = .90$)

Dependent Variable:

- **Acceptance of Cosmetic Surgery Scale** measures attitudes favorable of cosmetic surgery (Henderson-King & Henderson-King, 2005 ; $\alpha = .91$).

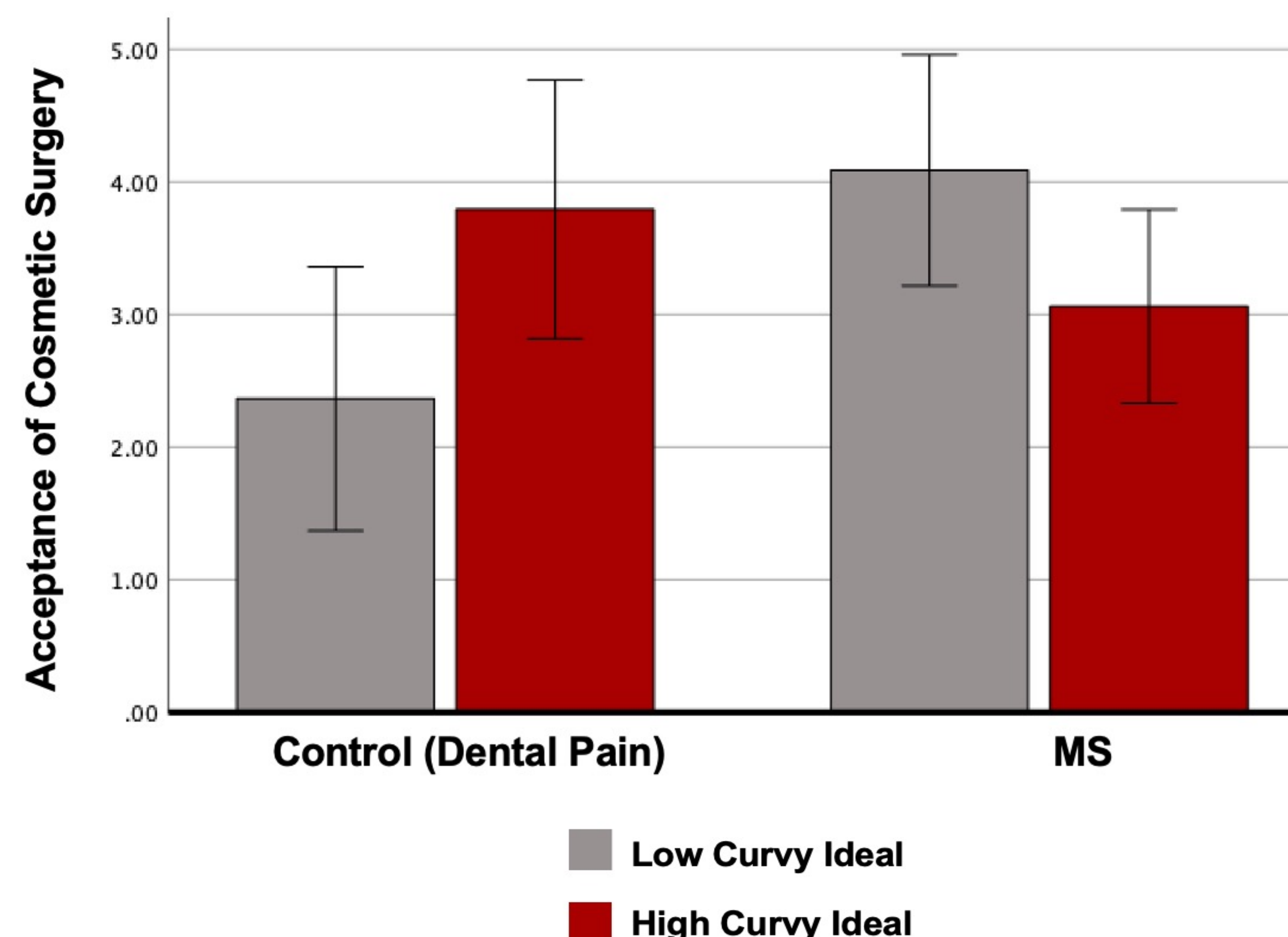
Individual differences

- Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965; $\alpha = .88$) and Fear of Negative Appearance Evaluation Scale (Lundgren et al., 2004; $\alpha = .94$)

Results

- A 2 (MS vs. dental pain) x 2 (low vs. high curvy ideal) ANOVA, which controlled for self-esteem and fear of negative appearance evaluations, on acceptance of cosmetic surgery indicated a significant interaction between the condition and curvy ideal internalization, $F(1, 23) = 9.17, p = 0.006, \eta^2 = 0.29$, but no significant main effects.
- Pairwise comparisons revealed that participants in the dental pain condition who exhibited higher internalization of the curvy ideal non-significantly increased attitudes favorable to cosmetic surgery in comparison to lower curvy ideals, $t(25) = 1.99, p = .058, d = 1.56$ [95% CI: -0.05, 2.91]. In the MS condition, there were no differences in attitudes toward cosmetic surgery based on curvy ideals, $t(25) = 1.81, p = 0.83, d = 0.61$ [95% CI: -0.15, 2.20].
- Participants with low curvy ideals in the MS condition significantly increased attitudes accepting of cosmetic surgery in comparison to the dental pain condition, $t(25) = 2.86, p = 0.009, d = 1.54$ [95% CI: 0.48, 2.97]. Among those with high curvy ideals, those in the MS and control conditions did not differ in their attitudes toward cosmetic surgery, $t(25) = 1.28, p = 0.21, d = 1.06$ [95% CI: -0.45, 1.91].

Figure 1. Attitudes Towards Cosmetic Surgery by Condition and Degree of Curvy Body Internalization



Discussion

- The present study built on prior research indicating that efforts to transform one's body to meet cultural standards can be an effective defense for alleviating death anxiety by exploring this phenomenon in the context of the growing curvy ideal.
- The results showed that when exposed to death, women with low curvy ideals adopt attitudes that reflect acceptance of cosmetic surgery procedures at higher rates.
- Future research should replicate this study with a larger, less homogenous sample.
- Investigations should also explore if death terror corresponds to actual behaviors, not just attitudes, that reflect approval of cosmetic surgery and what factors would drive an individual to demonstrate unhealthy attitudes that do not align with their personal beliefs following reminders of death.

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