The Scope Of Plastic Surgery As Seen Through The Eyes Of The Average American: A Survey
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Introduction
Plastic Surgery derives from the Greek word “plastike”, meaning the art of sculpting or molding, and can be subdivided into specialties such as aesthetics, reconstruction, craniofacial, hand, and microsurgery. Today, partially due to the influence of social media and reality TV, plastic surgery is one of the most romanticized fields in medicine. Ironically, with this enlarged spotlight brings a narrowed perception of the scope of plastic surgery in the eyes of the layperson. This study aims to assess the scope of plastic surgery through the eyes of the average American to identify gaps in public knowledge needing to be addressed for the field to be more accurately represented.

Methods
46 questions were developed under the supervision of faculty survey methodologists and administered through Qualtrics®. 2500 individual responses were gathered, and data was analyzed to assess the public’s knowledge of the scope and board-certification requirements of plastic surgery.

The first 18 questions consisted of a “select all that apply” format in which respondents were given the same list of answer choices and instructed to select the specialties that they would personally feel comfortable performing the given procedure on either themselves or a loved one. Resulting Respondents were also asked questions regarding the primary subspecialty of hand surgeons, oculoplastic surgeons, facial plastic surgeons, plastic surgeons, and cosmetic surgeons, as well as the length of training required to graduate from an ACGME-accredited program. Board certification requirements, perceived importance of surgeon board-certification, and respondents’ individual exposure to plastic surgery and the medical community were also assessed.

Periodic breaks in survey flow were placed to ensure respondents could not go back and change previous answers based on information provided by subsequent questions. Security features such as time and attention checks were placed randomly throughout the survey to ensure respondents were answering thoughtfully, and failure to answer these questions resulted in termination of the survey and disregard of these responses.

Results
2,500 individual responses were obtained balanced across regional, racial, and gender demographics similar to that of the United States. The data in Figure 1 shows the clear trend of the general public to perceive plastic surgery as a predominantly cosmetic field. The strict association between plastic and aesthetic surgery is further displayed when 81.5% of laypersons surveyed believe that it is required to complete a plastic surgery residency to legally perform cosmetic surgery. Figure 2 expounds on this association, allowing survey takers to choose what specialty training programs they believed were eligible to be board certified in cosmetic surgery. The public assumption of Oculoplastic and Facial Plastic surgeon’s primary specialties are similarly assessed in Figures 3-4.

Knowledge and perception of board certification was determined by asking respondents if they considered board certification important or essential. 96.8% of people said that they consider it important for their surgeon to be board certified, and 56.6% of people believe that all working plastic surgeons are actively board-certified. To illustrate public knowledge of the breadth of plastic surgery procedures, a breakdown of the general public’s comfort level with certain surgical specialties performing common plastic surgery procedures is displayed in Figure 5.

Conclusion
The results of this survey demonstrate a substantial gap in public awareness of the full spectrum of a field and a profound misconception of the scope of plastic surgery outside of the typical aesthetic procedures that are dramatized by the media. The general public also demonstrates a lack of clear understanding of the qualifications of plastic surgeons or the provider makeup of the field of cosmetic surgery. Subspecialties such as craniofacial and hand surgery are seemingly overlooked by the public, and knowledge of board-certification within the field was exceedingly sparse. This proves that significant further effort is needed to educate the general public on the scope of plastic surgery so that they might more easily identify and access the highest quality, safest, and most appropriate treatment from the diverse specialties.