

More than skin deep?

Trying to improve their looks, thousands of minors undergo cosmetic surgeries each year

At 16, Kate Deleveileuse was embarrassed by her calves. Her weight was normal, but she thought her calves were big. She wasn't confident wearing shorts or capri pants, so she asked her parents if she could have liposuction.

After considerable research and discussion, her parents agreed. Now 21, Deleveileuse was pictured on the front page of Thursday's USA Today — in shorts.

"I by no means think I have a perfect figure, but I am proportionate," she said. "It helped my self-esteem."

Deleveileuse is not alone. Elective cosmetic surgeries for minors have increased over the past several years. In 2000 there were 145,094 procedures done on minors, USA Today reported. In 2007 that number had grown to 205,119 procedures before dipping to 160,283 last year, a decline doctors attributed to the economy.

Donn Chatham, a plastic surgeon and president of the American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery, told USA Today that most of those surgeries were not for deformi-

ties, cleft palates or disfiguring marks. Most of the procedures were done on minors who wanted to improve their features — a smaller nose or bigger breasts, for example.

That fact has entered the debate over the ethics of cosmetic procedures for minors. Doctors say the underlying issue is typically a child's self-esteem. A procedure may be intended to help a child escape the taunts of peers or improve the child's image and popularity.

Such thinking is no surprise. Society's ideal body is sculpted and beautiful — "perfect." Children understand that. By the time they are teens the ideal has been reinforced in countless movies, TV shows and Web features.

However, medical researchers say that type of beauty may be only skin deep. There is little evidence to suggest that cosmetic surgeries achieve young patients' desires.

As for whether it is right for a minor to undergo cosmetic surgery and the risks involved, that is up to the child, her parents and the doctor. It is, however, a shame that so many children undergo surgery in an attempt to meet society's misplaced ideals.

