

The Botox Babies

BYLINE: Noelle Hancock

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"They're hearing about it from their mothers, so it trickles down," said Dr. Howard Sobel, an Upper East Side dermatologist who recently Botoxed a 17-year-old girl. Her 14-year-old sister expressed interest in the procedure as well. "We'll have girls walk in with a picture of her mother and say, 'I don't ever want to have that line like she does,'" Dr. Sobel said. "The 14-year-old was only copying the 17-year-old, who was copying what the mother did, and the mother was only 35. If you added up all the ages, maybe that person needed Botox!"

Considering the time and money New York girls are willing to expend on perfecting themselves, Botox is just another drop in the beauty-regimen bucket. At the height of what should be their ugly-ducking phase, New York teens look as sexy and smooth as heroes Lindsay Lohan, Mischa Barton and Hilary Duff, who are 18, 18 and 17, respectively. Since Britney, teen superstars have seemed to get younger, and look older, every year, inspiring young Lolitas with dreams of perfect skin, flowing hair and hot bodies. And for the privileged ones, expensive and now taboo-free cosmetic procedures make them come true. Hey, remember the oily years of awkward adolescence? Chances are, someday, these girls won't.

Dr. Sobel isn't the only doctor getting requests for forehead freezing by teenage girls. Dr. Adam Bodian, a dermatologist in Great Neck, Long Island, Botoxed a 15-year old girl. "She knew that fine lines come from a lifetime of making facial expressions," Dr. Bodian explained, "and she wanted to prevent future wrinkles."

And apparently, forehead wrinkles -- previously an obsession of the thirty-, forty- and fiftysomething sets -- are a new and pressing concern among teenagers. The American Society of Plastic Surgeons reports that 5,606 teens 18 and under were Botoxed in 2003, as opposed to the 534 that shot up in 2002.

Dr. Frederic Brandt, known as the Baron of Botox, is based primarily in Miami but spends one week each month at his practice on East 34th Street. While his No. 1 request from teens is collagen injection, some have offered up their armpits for Botox, in order to stop perspiration. (This procedure is popular with starlets who don't want to stain their expensive gowns during nerve-wracking award ceremonies like the Oscars.) "Being an excessive sweater can be quite embarrassing for a high-school student," Dr. Brandt said.

Manhattan kids also have the money -- of course, their *parents'* money -- to transform themselves. Once they start spending, and seeing the results, it's hard to stop. While most of us (and our inner 13-year-olds) would quake in our Nikes at the thought of even trying to mimic the dewy-skinned, thick-tressed Lindsay Lohan (oh, right, and *well-stacked*), New York teens, armed with more money and know-how than ever, hardly bat a mascara-coated eye. All of it adds up to a different kind of after-school project: themselves.

Like any addiction, it starts with the light stuff. Ariella Carlin, for example, a 16-year-old student at Hewitt School, an all-girls academy, pays for regular manicures, pedicures and waxings. She's had her hair Japanese-straightened twice ("I need to touch it up!") at the ritzy Peter Coppola salon on Madison Avenue, and she wears "a lot of Juicy," Seven jeans and the occasional Prada accessory. (Her style has landed her in *Seventeen* twice.) Ms. Carlin goes tanning and enjoys a good massage.

"I'm pretty high-maintenance," Ms. Carlin admits. "But the younger girls at my school are a lot more high-maintenance. They wear every designer and get their nails done every two days. I guess the younger generation is more influenced by that sort of thing."

Even high-society types -- for whom primping is a way of life -- are taking notice of this breed of Stepford Teen. At a recent party at Bergdorf's, accessories heiress CeCe Cord was holding court in an "old Givenchy" beige pantsuit with the sleeves hiked up. Her stunning model daughter, Elizabeth Kieselstein-Cord, 23, has flawless caramel skin, bee-stung lips and a body that deserves its own show on MTV, yet Ms. Cord suffered through some tough teen years.

"God, I remember being that age, and I looked like a giraffe! Gawky!" said the socialite. "It's amazing what's going on: No one's going through that weird, ugly stage of being odd-looking, scrawny and knob-kneed."

And judging by the way New York's teen girls look these days -- spending hours at hair salons, making trips to their neighborhood plastic surgeon, firming up their abs at teen Pilates classes -- Ms. Cord is right. Muffie Potter Aston, wife of renowned plastic surgeon Sherell Aston, noted that the awkward phases of girlhood seem to have disappeared. "I was a late bloomer -- and looking back, I'm glad, because I think it slowed everything down," Ms. Aston said. "I was always forced to rely on my personality instead of my looks."

Indeed, there's something strange about 2004's shiny girl-women.

"It's horrifying," said supermodel Frederique Van Der Wal, from the front row of the Luca Luca fashion show. "The kids are so aware of themselves. Girls are obsessed with being beautiful at this super-young age when they should be out playing games and having fun. I find it incredibly sad."

Wax On, Wax Off

The city's fashionable neighborhoods beckon with a treasure trove of salons and spas, drawing needy girls into their cool foyers, offering hope that when every last hair is plucked, every bump smoothed out, their teenage woes might disappear as well.

At the high-end salon Paul Labrecque, for example, roughly 20 high-school girls have weekly standing appointments for blow-dries, which go from \$55 to \$125. This summer, over 50 teens (including 12-year-olds) came in for Japanese thermal reconditioning, a technique that permanently straightens naturally curly hair and starts at \$750 a head.

Mr. Labrecque applauds the parents that bring their children to him. "We want to give our kids a little bit more than we had, and if they have a frizzball, they're going to get made fun of." Right now, he said, teens are coveting the flowing locks of

Lindsay Lohan. "We're doing three or four extensions a week -- which is a lot, considering the price tag is \$2,500 to \$3,500. It takes five hours."

At Ouidad, a fancy midtown salon, girls get their hair blown out before dates, and clients fly their kids in from California for \$120 haircuts. When Ouidad herself styles girls' hair for the prom, they're usually wearing Vera Wang.

"Isn't it horrible? They look better than we do!" said Ouidad, who's coiffed Sarah Jessica Parker and Rita Wilson. "Yesterday I had a girl say, 'Did you see Oscar de la Renta's show? I want that hair.' And I was like, 'Weren't you in school?' Their parents are taking them to fashion shows!" She was shocked this summer when she sent her daughter Sondriel to camp.

"Instead of doing arts and crafts, we'd stay in our cabin and do makeup and manicures, talk about fashion and what's in and what's out, and play with each other's hair," the 13-year-old told *The Observer*.

Parents, eager to solve their children's problems (or silence their complaints), probably feel that their ability to pay for prettiness necessitates that they do so. It's doesn't end with hair, of course. "We pretty much raised them into these monsters -- not bad monsters, but indulging monsters," Ouidad sighed. "They *need*. Everything is a *need*. There are no more luxuries."

Remember braces? It used to be that the only attractive thing about metal braces were the optional colored rubber bands, though even they left one's mouth looking like Vegas. Now Invisalign's clear braces set teens' teeth straight imperceptibly -- humiliation not included.

Dr. Lana Rozenberg, a cosmetic dentist, tends to patients at her Dental Day Spa on West 54th Street where kids watch DVD's and listen to CD's ("They really like Usher!") while they're being worked on. One out of three teens who visits Dr. Rozenberg asks for veneers, essentially fake fingernails for teeth. The process involves grinding the front of each tooth so that a perfectly shaped false tooth can be adhered to the front; the result is a symmetrical smile.

Dr. Rozenberg doesn't recommend them. "If you're 18, and veneers last 20 years, you're going to have to change them at least four times -- at least -- and that's a lot," she said. And that's at \$1,000 to \$2,000 a tooth.

Thousands of dollars are also being spent at salons such as Completely Bare, on Madison Avenue. Teens are passing on Brazilian and upper-lip waxes in favor of permanent hair reduction, even though the process involves six treatments, there's a decent chance that hair could grow back after their body matures, and it costs about \$1,000.

"The parents are recognizing that children can't get away with hair on the face," said owner Cindy Barshop. Recently, Ms. Barshop had to turn down someone requesting permanent hair removal for their 7-year-old. "Ridiculous!" she scoffed. "And just too traumatic for the child."

But full-body waxing seems benign compared to the more invasive procedures young girls sign up for in anticipation of skirting over the pudgy acne years. Popular dermatologist Dr. Patricia Wexler, whose office is in Murray Hill, said chemical peels and microdermabrasion are standard practice for young patients. Teens even request

liposuction under their chin to accentuate the jaw line. In her opinion, the drive for perfection comes from lack of confidence. "They're trying to keep up with their contemporaries," Dr. Wexler said.

At Karma Kids Yoga, on West 14th Street, owner Jeannene Levinson said that pre-teens are already growing self-conscious about their bodies, too. "You have 10-year-olds asking, 'How do I make my abs tight? How can I keep this from jiggling?'" Ms. Levinson said. "And it's like, 'Are you kidding? You weigh 70 pounds!'"

At the Upper East Side's Goodson Parker Wellness Center, 10 to 15 percent of the clientele for colonics are teenage girls who come in, say, after reading an article in which an actress credits the center with keeping their skin blemish-free and their stomachs flat for the red carpet.

"Students will come before prom and graduation, or after they overdid it at Thanksgiving," said founder and clinical psychologist Dr. DeAnsin Parker. "They talk about feeling light and energized when they leave."

A colon therapist at a downtown facility recently had a disturbing visit from a 15-year-old: "She came for a series of five in a week before she went on vacation so that she'd look skinny for the beach. It's upsetting to see girls like that."

What I Did On My Summer Vacation

"I know some people who've gotten plastic surgery and I think it's fine," said a 16-year-old Manhattan private-school student. A recent *New York Times* article noted that these days, 13-year-olds are getting nose jobs and even 6-year-olds have their ears pinned back.

"A lot of people do things over the summer, because you're expected to look different after the summer," she went on. "There were some girls who were going to be freshmen this year that were getting their noses done, and everyone thought that was weird. But I think that when you're older, like 16, it's O.K. I had a breast reduction, and word got around extremely fast -- like I told one person, and suddenly everyone in school and people outside of school knew. There were more jokes than mean things. Girls would say, 'Save it for me!'"

Dr. Dan Baker, the renowned cosmetic surgeon, wearing scrubs and sitting in his Upper East Side office, shook his head at the mention of "those crazy plastic-surgery shows" like *The Swan*, *Extreme Makeover* and -- the most sinister of all -- MTV's *I Want A Famous Face*. Such programs trivialize and glorify surgery by rarely portraying complications or difficult recoveries (although, to be fair, MTV has shown girls reversing their procedures).

"The pop stars are definitely having an influence, particularly with breasts," said Dr. Baker. "It appears that virtually all of the them have implants." The American Society of Plastic Surgeons reports that boob jobs were up 24 percent among teens. "Kids get into this mode of a quick fix or an easy out," he went on, explaining that he tries to talk at least one in three teenage patients out of having a procedure. "When you're 15, you think a cute little nose is what you want -- but when you get older, your aesthetic sense changes."

At that point, his son Dan Jr. walked into the office and brought his father an iced coffee. The handsome 26-year-old society fixture has met many girls who put the

"no" in nose job. "I've seen girls get nose jobs too young," Dan Jr. said, "and then they have to get another one when they get older because the nose doesn't fit their face."

Boris Volshteyn of the Manhattan Surgical Arts on Park Avenue credits the Internet with the increased interest in plastic surgery among teens. Young girls request that he excise the baby fat from their faces so that they can look older. "Girls come in with pictures from the teen magazines, saying, 'I saw on TV that you can make me look like a movie star.' We're getting phone calls asking about things we haven't even heard of -- and the calls are getting younger and younger."

"The parents are competitive also," said Dr. Bodian, the dermatologist who Botoxed a 15-year-old. "They feel the kids are doing better if they're looking better."

And kids probably feel better if they're working on themselves and taking their physical idiosyncrasies into their own hands. In many ways, having a "problem" and rapidly fixing it feels good; just knowing that a remedy is out there -- remedies sanctioned by the sophisticated adult culture-at-large -- comes as comfort. Often, however, it feels like pressure to be perfect too.

"Leave it to Spence to offer Pilates!" laughed one Upper School student (let's call her Gwyneth) about her high school, Spence, an Upper East Side private all-girls school. "My friends and I joke amongst ourselves that if we ever got pregnant, we would be kicked out of school -- not because we were pregnant, but for getting fat! You will not walk into Spence and see someone who's overweight. By the time that she's a freshman, she'll be thin."

Gwyneth went on: "I don't feel like I've been rushed through childhood, although I will say that I've already had five friends who've been in and out of rehab, and seven or eight who've had plastic surgery. They're just overprivileged. It's like, when you have so much excess, what else are you going to do?"

Emma Racine, a lanky sophomore at the Dalton School is an accomplished track star and soccer player. "New York City kids are all about coming to school and pretending like they don't care when, in reality, it took them forever to get dressed," Ms. Racine said. This manufactured nonchalance has led to stressful mornings in front of the closet. "Sometimes I just feel so retarded and ugly," she added, "and I wake up and think, 'I just want to put on sweat pants.'"

Part of the problem is that New York's endless options leave the girls with little excuse for mistakes, least of all fashion faux pas. "It's very easy just to walk into any store, whereas if I lived in the suburbs, it would be a lot harder," said Emily Shapiro, 16, a sophomore at Riverdale Country Day School in the Bronx. "My friends will spend hours getting ready for school. We're very conscious of our looks."

"Teens are being rushed through childhood; it's an enormous problem here in New York," said Dr. Robert Leahy, Director of the American Institute for Cognitive Therapy. "Being a kid and being able to be goofy, have fun and make mistakes -- there's no place for that in Manhattan. You've got to be the *Cosmo* Girl."

But it's unlikely these girls will slow things down.

"Depression has increased for my generation," said 15-year-old Melanie Wallner, an aspiring actress. "I think some girls use shopping as a way to make them feel better

-- to keep pushing the sadness down instead of confronting how they really feel. But then they have to keep going and can't really stop."