



The Psychology of Cosmetic Procedures

Nivedita Bishnoi and Kalpana Rawat

School of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Mody University of Science and Technology, Rajasthan, India.

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ABSTRACT- With increasing pressure of the perfectly curated appearance from celebrities and social media influencers everyday in our faces, more and more people are inclining towards cosmetic procedures to get the ideal beauty standards of the society. The present study aims at experimentally investigating the effect of cosmetic procedures on an individual's confidence, self-esteem and psychological well-being. The study was done on six culturally diverse women, aged between 20 to 50 years, who have undergone cosmetic and aesthetic procedures and have expressed their experiences of the medical procedure and its aftermath effects via online focused interview with the researcher. The findings implied that although cosmetic surgeries may improve someone's satisfaction with a particular body part and increase their confidence and esteem levels, it again does not alleviate their mental health problems and on the contrary, the mental health issues may actually increase if they already had them to begin with.

KEYWORDS- Cosmetic surgery, psychological effects, mental health, body image, social media, appearance satisfaction.

I. INTRODUCTION

The term "plastic surgery" is a surgical specialty involving the restoration, reconstruction, or alteration of the human body. It is an umbrella term for two major subgroups- cosmetic/aesthetic surgery and reconstructive surgery. Cosmetic surgery is the plastic surgery we are most familiar with today and refers to changing your appearance for aesthetic purposes. On the other hand, reconstructive surgery is defined as restoring function to a body part that has been disfigured.

In this new era of millennial generation and social expectations rising from all over the globe, the interest and demand for cosmetic procedures have never been higher, and according to new data, it's not likely to slow down anytime soon.

The American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery [AAFPRS] (February 10, 2022) found that there is a catapulting increase

in demand for facial plastic surgery and aesthetic procedures in 2021- both surgical and non surgical facial plastic surgery treatments were bigger in appeal than ever. The AAFPRS surveyed and estimated that an average of 1.4 million surgical and non surgical procedures have been done in the past year, with the surgeons performing an average of 600 more procedures than they did in 2020 and formulating an increase of 40% than the previous year. Adding to that, there was also a notable increase of 83% in AAFPRS surgeon's bookings over the course of last year, with most common procedures being rhinoplasty, facelift and blepharoplasty. Also, according to 2019 survey data, 85% of these cosmetic procedures were minimally invasive. However, cosmetic dermatologist Heidi Waldorf does warn that the non invasive and quick nature of these procedures has led to the coexistent idea that they are no more serious than a makeup application or a hair blowout, when obviously there are more risks involved.

1.1 THE ORIGIN OF PLASTIC SURGERY

So what basically is beauty? They say that beauty lies in the eyes of the beholder. But depending on what society and generation you grew up in, there are some shared ideas of beauty that you have with other members of your community. In America today, ideal beauty is represented by the Kardashian clan, a severe hourglass body shape and a face represented by a mix of ethnic features, but still distinctly white.

But it was not always the set standard. In the 1920s, the boyish charm of Mary Pickford was pegged as the all American beauty ideal, to the point where the winner of the 1921 Miss America beauty pageant, Margret Gorman, bore a notable strong resemblance to Mary. Then in the 1950s, we had the Marilyn's, the Elizabeth Taylor's, those well endowed beautiful ladies with elegant groomed hairstyles. Skipping ahead to the 1990s, we had the straight supermodel proportions of Kate Moss and



Naomi Campbell. So, unfortunately, body types and facial features have always been and probably always will be, a fashion trend.

Even though plastic surgery procedures have existed long ago like a severe-looking skin graft procedure was discovered in an Indian ancient book called the 'Sushruta Samhita' - dating back to 8th century BC. Lurking in a corner of the book's 184 chapters was a technique using a leaf-shaped flap from the forehead to reconstruct the nose. The technique was published in the 'Gentleman's Magazine of Calcutta' in October 1794 and it soon became widely used; known as the 'Indian Method'. But the modern plastic surgery industry as we know today, really originated in the early 20th century. But why is that?

According to the novel "American Beauty" (Banner, 1983), in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, beauty was identified as the "inner true beauty". As in it was more important for women to have a good personal character, healthy lifestyle routines and to engage in proper thinking. However, by the end of the Victorian era, we saw a rise of consumerism and the development of a stronger and bigger beauty industry. Notably, in new cosmetics and hair care techniques. And the beauty industry subsequently encouraged women to focus more on their outward appearance and hence now, external beauty was more important than internal beauty.

World War One was a big game changer in the plastic surgery industry. A lot of soldiers who were lucky enough to come home sustained major facial injuries. As the New York Times observed, "no wounds of the European war have been quite so shocking as those to the human faces". Thus surgeons were now tasked with reconstructive surgery to give economic independence back to the veteran. As one surgeon puts it, "What is the use of life if he is not in a condition to seek and earn a livelihood?" referring to the unfortunate standard to society that has always prioritised beauty. Physical ugliness has been considered a marker for evilness and beauty has been considered a marker for morality and goodness. According to the criminology book "The Criminal Mind" (Lombroso, 1876) it is suspected that you can detect a criminal by his physique. Someone with prehensile feet, left handedness, hernias, outstanding ears, abundant hair, a sparse beard, enormous front sinuses, prognathism, broad cheekbones, a low and retreating forehead, oblique eyes, a small skull, and

in women, a masculine face was probably an evil doer.

Given the society's beauty ideology, these wartime deformities were off-putting to the average American eye. This led to a real serious concern that the young men who were drafted into the war, who were forced to put their lives on the line to fight for overall societal rights, would have trouble finding a job and being able to make money when they came back.

The bright side is that the technology and science that goes into plastic surgery improved drastically during this time period. As stated in the cultural book "Making the Body Beautiful: A Cultural History of Aesthetic Surgery" (Gilman, 1999), that "the growth of cosmetic surgery coincided with the spread of so-called 'race science', that linked one's physical appearance to one's character and intelligence". Coming back to the 21st century, we were introduced to the phenomenon called "the Instagram face". This phrase came from the Instagram Face article (Tolentino, 2019) from the New Yorker. Hua describes the Instagram face as: "a young face, of course, with pore less skin and plump, high cheekbones. It has catlike eyes and long, cartoonish lashes; it has a small, neat nose and full, lush lips. It looks at you coyly but blankly, as if its owner has taken half a klonopin and is considering asking you for a private jet ride to Coachella. The face is distinctly white but ambiguously ethnic". Celebrity makeup artist Colby Smith adds: "We're talking an overly tan skin tone, a South Asian influence with the brows and the eyes shape, an African American influence with the lips, a Caucasian influence with nose, a cheek structure that is predominantly Native American and Middle Eastern". So as we can see, the ideal face went from all-American white, blonde Barbie to something racially exotic but still white passing.

The Kardashians sort of created this face and so it's no surprise that celebrity plastic surgeon Jason Diamond said: "I'd say that 30% of people come in bringing a photo of Kim Kardashian or someone like Kim...there's a handful of people, but she's at the very top of the list, and understandably so. It's one of the biggest challenges I have, educating the person about whether it's reasonable to try to move along that path toward Kim's face, or towards whoever". Doctors even say that the future of plastic surgery is more plastic surgery. With cosmetic treatments becoming more advanced, more



affordable and less taboo, this boom or bane is just the beginning.

1.2 PLASTIC SURGERY- AN OVERVIEW

It is a common misunderstanding that the word plastic in plastic surgery means artificial. The word comes from the ancient Greek word *plastikos*, which means to mold or give form. Plastic surgery is a surgical specialty involved with both the improvement in a person's appearance and the reconstruction of facial and body tissue defects caused by illness, trauma, or birth disorders.

The field of Plastic Surgery can be broken down into two main categories – reconstructive procedures and cosmetic procedures. Reconstructive surgery is performed to restore function and normal appearance, and correct deformities created by birth defects, trauma or medical conditions including cancer. Examples include surgical correction of birth anomalies, congenital nevi surgery, and liposuction for lipedema. Cosmetic surgery, however, is performed to enhance overall cosmetic appearance by reshaping and adjusting normal anatomy to make it visually more appealing. Unlike reconstructive surgery, cosmetic surgery is not considered medically necessary. Breast augmentation, breast lift, liposuction, abdominoplasty (tummy tuck) and facelift are popular examples of cosmetic surgery procedures.

1.3 CORRELATED VARIABLES LINKED WITH COSMETIC PROCEDURES

Typically people get cosmetic procedures because they desire an improved appearance and the benefits that come with it. People with distorted self image want to fix problems that others do not perceive. And body dystrophic disorder (bdd) is actually estimated to be in play in about 7- 15% of those who seek cosmetic procedures. These are just a few statistically proven examples. But there do exist a trend between people undergoing cosmetic surgeries and a few correlated variables. It includes the following-

1. **Body dissatisfaction-** It stands to reason that if you're dissatisfied with your body then you're going to try to do things to fix it. Body dissatisfaction is essentially the feeling of discrepancy between your actual body and the ideal body as you see fit. Young women who are satisfied with their bodies are the least likely to desire bodily change and that certainly makes sense as in if you feel good about yourself of course you are not going

to go to the extreme cost and length of getting your body significantly changed.

2. **Lower self esteem-** Lower self esteem is also correlated with people who get cosmetic procedures. They go to extreme lengths just for the sake of making their image improve, not only in eyes of others but also in their own.

3. **Mental health issues-** Prospective cosmetic surgery patients tend to have higher rates of mental health problems, depression, anxiety, self harm, suicide, substance abuse and eating disorders. On average they (cosmetic surgery patients) have more of these mental health problems than non patients.

4. **Weight-** The individual's weight is also correlated with who tends to get cosmetic procedures. Both heavier and extremely lower weights are correlated with trying to get cosmetic procedures. If you're overweight, then you are very stigmatised in our society leading to distress and wanting to change their body. If you're underweight, then you are very likely to have a restrictive eating disorder leading to seeking to change your body. So it is typically a U shaped bell curve between your desire for cosmetic procedures and your weight.

5. **Bullying-** Bullying and teasing are also associated with wanting to get cosmetic procedures because they are correlated with worse body image and depression.

6. **Personality variables-** A study by Takatsuji and colleagues found that people who have a facial deformity and cosmetic solutions start off with higher levels of hysteria on the MMPI scale, psychasthenia, social introversion as well as depression.

7. **Social media exposure-** In a study by Walker and colleagues concluded that yes viewing images of women who have undergone cosmetic enhancements did cause the women who saw that to also be more prone to seeking cosmetic enhancements and this was especially true if they spend a significant amount of time on social media, if they followed a lot of influencing accounts and if they were less satisfied with their appearance. In conclusion women who are unsatisfied with their appearance, and spent a lot of time on social media especially looking at images of surgerised women have a higher chance of seeking cosmetic procedures themselves.



8. Gender- The gender of an individual is obviously very much correlated with people who want to get cosmetic procedures. Women are overwhelmingly the ones that seek out cosmetic enhancements. Many studies don't even explain why it is that they're primarily speaking about and exploring women specifically. But mainly it is because women get it worse when it comes to beauty standards and other general social stress such as having to worry about safety in public spaces, experiencing sexism and so on. But although men who undergo the cosmetic procedures are a minority, they basically has same predictors as women- lower ratings of body image satisfaction, increased amount of time watching media, increased amount of time on social media, higher degrees of masculine gender role stress.

Physical appearance is an important aspect of one's identity and its correlation with an individual's self image, confidence and self esteem begins early in life. Although these perceptions of self esteem and confidence are guided by personal preference and innate ideologies, there is no denying that external factors do influence these trends majorly. One major influence is the factor of internalization of appearance ideals. This occurs when a person has accepted societies' beauty ideals and engages in behaviors to achieve that ideal.

With increasing pressure of the perfectly curated appearance from celebrities and social media influencers everyday in our faces, more and more people are inclining towards cosmetic procedures to get the ideal beauty standards of the society. Therefore, this study is aimed to measure the influence of cosmetic procedures on an individual's self-esteem, overall confidence and psychological well-being.

II. METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted on a group of six culturally diverse women, in the age group of 20 to 50 years who have undergone cosmetic and aesthetic procedures and have expressed their point of views of the medical procedure and its aftermath via the means of online interviews with the researcher through the method of focused personal interview. Focused interview is an example of an applied semi-structured interview and it is one of the most frequently used interview types. This interview format enables versatile interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee.

The subjects were approached for the research study via mail and were given total

unambiguous information regarding the study and the assurance of confidentiality was firmly maintained. After getting the confirmation mails, time was set up for 30 minutes of personal interviews based on each subject's convenience. During the interview process, an empathetic and understanding rapport was established with each subject and information was retracted by skilful questioning and analyzing of the subject's procedural journey.

III. OBSERVATIONS FROM THE RESULT

From studying the cases of following six women, we can conclude our result based on subject's self confidence, esteem and psychological well being as follows-

Table1-

SUBJECT	CONFIDENCE	SELF ESTEEM	PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING
Subject 1	Increase	Increase	Decrease
Subject 2	Increase	Increase	Increase
Subject 3	Decrease	Decrease	Decrease
Subject 4	Increase	Increase	Decrease
Subject 5	Increase	Decrease	Increase
Subject 6	Increase	Increase	Stagnant

IV. CONCLUSION

It was found that women experienced improvement in body image and small but statistically significant improvement in self esteem. There were no improvements to the psychological problems after the enhancement but the fewer the psychological problems they had before going under the knife, the greater their satisfaction afterwards and they in turn greater their self esteem boost afterwards. The way a person perceives themselves in their mind has an immense impact on their personality, dealing with the public, work-life and social life. Further when a person sees themselves after a plastic surgical procedure, she/he builds a new opinion about herself/himself. When some bothering issue is fixed, there's a significant boost of confidence in the patients. By building up a better opinion about yourself, you finally get across that hurdle that's been bothering you. And in turn every other aspect of one's life improves as well including relationships, social skills, workplace behaviour and interactions and more.



It can be seen that almost every subject had an increase in confidence and self esteem post their cosmetic procedures. One key piece of confidence in our highly-visual worlds is appearance. Appearance and self-esteem are, for most people, contributing factors to social and relationship confidence levels. It can be interpreted that these procedures helped the individuals to create a positive body image, made them feel great about themselves and improved their relations and overall quality of life. It is important to note that though plastic surgery is an exciting operation as men and women remove their insecurities and reveal a newfound confidence. The doctor can work wonders, but cosmetic surgeons can't erase mental health disorders. People who are looking for a sense of control or trying to mask other problems in their life will not benefit from a cosmetic fix. It is clearly seen from the data when there is an overall decrease in psychological well being of individuals who were already having pre-existing psychological problems and stagnation in patients with none. The only increase is seen in individuals who were psychologically healthy pre-surgery and went under the knife with realistic expectations.

The cosmetic procedures may improve one's body image but they will not solve your psychological issues. So if one's body image issues stem from a psychological problem such as BDD, social anxiety, depression, personality disorder and so on, those still will be there after the procedure. People need to address those separately rather than throwing a bandaid on a problem. And while there can be improvements in body image these do not hugely affect self esteem as body image is mostly a fractional part of overall self esteem. Cosmetic procedures will not fix an individual's self esteem issues even if it may slightly bump it up. If an individual does have significant mental health issues, he/she may want to reconsider cosmetic procedures because these procedures will not resolve anything and one may have worse outcomes than one's peers with fewer mental health struggles. This has been proven by many other studies as well, consistently. For example, as we have seen Individuals with BDD who engage in cosmetic enhancements as a way to treat their symptoms often have very negative outcomes such as being even more dissatisfied, unhappy with the surgery and showing even higher levels of psychopathology and lower self esteem.

Although cosmetic surgeries may improve someone's satisfaction with a particular body part, it

again does not alleviate their mental health problems and on the contrary, the mental health issues may actually increase if they already had them to begin with.

Also this research also debunks the concept of halo effect as it is not also necessarily true that getting an attractive appearance will lead to a positive perception from society and people in general. Rather, it seems that fine looking individuals who got cosmetic surgery or procedures done were subjected to a negative perception and image from society than those who didn't go for the procedure.

In conclusion, if an individual has mental health issues and seeks cosmetic procedures, he/she may improve the bodily concern but can actually make their mental health worse off. If one has a mental health issue intertwined with the wish for a cosmetic surgery, it can be seriously suggested that they think twice because they could much more effectively resolve both the psychological problem and dissatisfaction with a specific body part through something like a therapy or medication rather than going under a knife or sticking a needle in it.

With an increase in social media and technology, the culture of influencers and celebrities being candid of their naturally unattainable beauty standards is growing more than ever and yet this area of research is still vastly under considered and lacks proper knowledge of association between cosmetic procedures and affective variables of personal and social aspects of the patient. Furthermore, the future research can also be held regarding the connection of reinforcement of following aesthetic procedures on mental health of the patient as well as his/her social group.

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