

Self-Image of Women after Plastic Surgery - A Clinical Study

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Abstract:

The study addressed the behavior of cosmetic surgery as an increasingly common behavior among women who are preoccupied with their bodies and perceive their self-image through them. Physical flaws and imperfections are seen as flaws in the self, making cosmetic surgery a means of repair and change. The study hypothesized that changes occur in a woman's self-image after cosmetic surgery, specifically in her personal, social, and ideal self-image. To test these hypotheses, a sample was selected for study, consisting of two women aged 33 and 39, who had undergone cosmetic surgery one year and four months and six months ago, respectively. They were chosen from women who had undergone cosmetic surgery, as part of the study population, using a purposive sampling method based on set criteria and required characteristics, with assistance from doctors.

The sample was specific in terms of number and characteristics, so the study was conducted in-depth using two tools: a semi-structured interview and the *Genèse des Perceptions de Soi* (Genesis of Self-Perceptions) test by René L'Écuyer, within the framework of the clinical method.

Based on the information gathered and analyzed, the study concluded that after undergoing cosmetic surgery, a woman experiences a series of changes in her self-image. These changes occur in her personal, social, and ideal self-image, with differences in the nature and course of these changes between the two cases.

Keywords: cosmetic surgery, self-image, woman, René L'Écuyer's Genesis of Self-Perceptions test, phenomenology.

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Introduction:

A woman's self-image represents a crucial pillar and foundation in shaping her personality and the way she communicates and interacts with the outside world and others. It refers to the way a woman perceives and imagines herself, in a manner closely connected to her past and present experiences and situations, and tends towards an idealized future vision. The formation of her self-image directly stems from and is influenced by her external appearance and body shape, which she presents both to herself and others. This appearance holds great significance for her, as it serves as the first impression she offers and engages with others. Its presence and display are not limited to mere visibility but are also associated with a particular characteristic that has both historical and developmental dimensions: beauty. Beauty is a property of experience and judgment for both her and others, and its realization or absence leads to distinctive psychological and social representations and consequences.

The continuous rise of globalization and technology, through its various mechanisms and media — primarily modern media and social media — has contributed to the presentation of specific beauty standards for shape and appearance. These standards have been adopted as ideal aesthetic norms that every woman aspires to achieve, through various means such as sports, diets, and cosmetic tools, among others. All of these are non-surgical interventions, while cosmetic surgery is one of these means, though it is a surgical intervention aimed at enhancing one's external appearance. This method has become statistically more prevalent in Western societies and is increasingly present in Arab societies, even if it has not been explicitly normalized. It includes various types of interventions depending on the methods and areas of the body being targeted, driven by multiple motivations that vary among those opting for surgery.

Cosmetic surgery is a selective medical procedure that enhances the appearance through surgical techniques from a medical perspective. From a psychological standpoint, however, it carries other conscious and unconscious dimensions, seen in factors related to the acceptance of undergoing cosmetic surgery and the psychological consequences during and after the procedure. These are connected to socio-psychological and cultural factors.

The growing interest in cosmetic surgery goes beyond the concept of changing the physical appearance through surgical intervention limited to the body and its characteristics. It extends to altering psychological traits. Cosmetic surgery has become a common choice for some women to improve their external appearance and the way they perceive and view themselves,

which is considered the ultimate potential of the body. This is where the role of our study comes in, attempting to identify and determine whether this change exists and, if so, its nature.

1. The problem:

In recent years, there has been a continuous increase in the demand for cosmetic surgery worldwide. According to statistics from the International Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (ISAPS), which released the results of its annual global survey on cosmetic procedures, there was an overall increase of 19.3% in procedures performed by plastic surgeons in 2021, with more than 12.8 million surgical procedures and 17.5 million non-surgical procedures carried out worldwide. The report shows a consistent rise in cosmetic surgery, with an increase of 33.3% over the past four years, despite a decline in 2020 due to COVID-19.

Some studies have indicated that the rate of cosmetic surgery is higher among women than men, across various age groups. According to statistics from the American Society of Aesthetic Plastic Surgery in 2007, cited in Espinoza's 2012 study, 9.9 million women underwent cosmetic surgery, with the majority being women over the age of 40. Of these, 45% were between 40-50 years old, 26% were over 50, 19% were between 30-39 years old, and 7% were between 20-29 years old. The total revenue reached more than 8 billion dollars, with 67.5% of women being married, 66.9% being educated, 74.3% employed, 74.5% mothers, and 28.8% having a university degree or higher.

Many researchers have explored the topic of cosmetic surgery, attempting to understand its causes, effects, and implications, and to analyze its relationship with psychological and social factors such as existence, identity, personality, disorders, and relationships with others and the self.

In the absence of a single unified theory, multiple approaches have been adopted to study self-image, each with its own perspective and objectives. One such approach is the phenomenological approach, which directs the currents of psychology that focus on human consciousness. This approach views self-image as a process and a moment of reflective and introspective awareness, which is gathered in the space between subjectivity and objectivity, bridging the visible and invisible. It emphasizes the temporal process (past, present, and future), unlike other approaches that focus only on the past or a single phase. Additionally, it concentrates on consciousness and appearance rather than the unconscious.

Self-image overlaps with various concepts such as self-concept, self-esteem, self-perception, ideal self, mental image (IMAGO), identity, and other concepts, to the extent that many researchers use these terms interchangeably with self-image. The lack of consensus on a unified theory has led to self-image being analyzed from multiple dimensions. For example, Oltmann (2014) identified three main divisions of self-image: how an individual perceives themselves or how they think others perceive them, and the way they wish to be. Another division included low self-image, high self-image, and ideal self-image. Other categories included physical, skill-related, mental, psychological, moral, and sexual dimensions. While this work is not universally accepted as a standard model, it represents a scientific effort and a possible way of viewing self-image among other approaches that will be explored later in this research.

Freund (2004) stated that a woman's self-image can be negatively affected at every transitional stage of life. At each stage, she dreams of becoming a certain way, based on her previous image, or may lose and abandon that image altogether. Generally, it can be said that improving oneself both internally and externally brings about real changes in self-image and self-esteem. Freund also emphasized the importance of comparisons in the formation of this image, especially during adolescence, a period when concerns about the body and self are at their peak, often leading to problems and disorders. Thus, self-image, while highly influential, is subject to change and can be affected by numerous psychological, social, and biological factors. Any impact, whether positive or negative, has the potential to bring about real changes in a person's quality of life, mental health, performance, and relationships. The study of this impact is central to the work of clinical psychology specialists and researchers.

Furthermore, literature in psychology indicates that a woman should constantly see herself, and she is almost always accompanied by her self-image. The focus shifts from the body to the self, influenced by external judgments and standards regarding appearance. Therefore, cosmetic surgery is not limited to changing the body alone but extends to making changes to the self, aiming to renew and improve both aspects, to make them more acceptable and reduce the psychological distress associated with self-image as reflected in the mirror or in the perception of others. This has been confirmed by Delmar and Mattéi (2011) in their book *Philosophie de la chirurgie esthétique*, where they cited the results of numerous psychological studies confirming that women who undergo cosmetic surgery become less

depressed, more accepting of and respectful towards themselves, and more stable in their intimate relationships.

Based on this, the main question of this study can be formulated as follows:

- Do changes occur in a woman's self-image after cosmetic surgery?

This main question leads to several sub-questions, including:

Sub-Questions:

- Do changes occur in a woman's personal self-image after cosmetic surgery?
- Do changes occur in a woman's social self-image after cosmetic surgery?
- Do changes occur in a woman's ideal self-image after cosmetic surgery?

2. Hypotheses:

General hypothesis:

- Changes occur in women's self-image after plastic surgery.

Partial hypotheses:

- Changes happenOn women's personal self-image after plastic surgery.
- Changes occur in women's social self-image after plastic surgery.
- Changes occur to a woman's ideal self-image after plastic surgery.

3. Objectives of the study:

The study aims to find out whether plastic surgery makes a change in the way women view their physical characteristics.

The study aims to know the effect of plastic surgery on the feelings that women direct towards themselves.

The study seeks to determine whether plastic surgery achieves women's self-satisfaction.

The study aims to identify the social appreciation that women receive after undergoing plastic surgery.

The research aims to reveal the social status achieved by plastic surgery.

The research seeks to examine the fulfillment of women's desires as a result of plastic surgery.

The research aims to verify whether women achieve their aspirations through plastic surgery.

4. Motivations for plastic surgery:

Many scientific researches in the field of beauty have dealt with the topic of the motives and reasons that increase the rate of people's acceptance and demand for cosmetic surgical interventions in order to have a deeper understanding of this phenomenon. In this regard, we find a clear discrepancy in studies and among scholars regarding the actual motives. Each one speaks according to his understanding, his specialty, and the context of his research. temporal and spatial; On the other hand, this discrepancy is due to the subjectivity of the request, as the personal reasons for which a person requests surgery vary, outside of those that are beautifying for the purpose of restoration and that deal with obvious congenital or physical deformities, and among the motives that can be mentioned are the following:

5. The Practical Aspect:

Study method: In our study, we adopted the “clinical approach” (case study) because it suits the subject of the study and its circumstances, as it allows for in-depth study of the individual as a single case and distinct from others. This approach represents the in-depth scientific study of an individual case or cases, in order to arrive at comprehensive information and understanding about it in its temporal process. (Past, present, future), whether or not, taking into account the distinction of each case from other cases due to its difference in the context and experience that it has experienced. It, the way they are reported, and the impact that follows them. (Alyan, 2001, p. 51)

5.1. Characteristics of the study sample cases:

The characteristics of the cases sampled in the study are summarized as follows:

Table No. 1 - Characteristics of the basic study sample cases

the condition	Age	the conditionSocial	Duration since surgery	height	the weight	Sick history	History of accidents
(for)	33 years old	Single	One year and four months	157 Sim	67 kg	nothing	nothing
(M)	39 years old	married	6 months	164 Sim	75 kg	nothing	nothing

5.2. Presenting and analyzing the results:**A. The First case (b):**

Before plastic surgery, case (B) was negatively aware of her physical characteristics, her feelings and emotions were directed towards herself, and therefore self-satisfaction was not achieved.

After plastic surgery:

- A positive change in her perception of the characteristics of her body and its negotiating capabilities, with an awareness and feeling of change and happiness with it, and reaching a temporary state of self-satisfaction.
- The source of the case's self-image is still non-self, and there have been changes in her social self-image that are evident in her relationships with others and her position among them, in addition to a change in the way she perceives others' views of her and improves their comments about her.
- The case's desires are fulfilled through plastic surgery, but its aspirations are still unattainable, and so the ideal self-image is an ongoing, incomplete point project.

B. The second case (M):

Before plastic surgery, Case M was experiencing a kind of stability in her self-image, but the emotional and sexual pressures exerted by her husband due to her change in physical appearance made her submit to plastic surgery with the intention of regaining his approval and acceptance of her.

After plastic surgery, the following changes occurred in M's self-image:

- Instability in the personal self-image, as she begins to perceive her physical characteristics positively at times, as she expresses her admiration and satisfaction with her appearance and self at times, and uses the metaphor of amputation and shows remorse for change and fear of it at other times.
- The distortion of the social self-image appears in the apparent contradiction between awareness and subjective values and reflective awareness and non-personal values, and between showing the compulsivity of the decision taken on the one hand and its intentionality on the other hand (revenge); An intersubjective imbalance also arises in her awareness, which is evident in her admiration for others' compliments and regaining her

self-confidence, while at the same time she realizes and feels inferiority and amputation that the decision to have plastic surgery is not motivated by her own values.

- A distortion of the ideal self-image, as the loss of her connection to her own values led to a change in her direction towards the ideal image that she had achieved in motherhood and family formation in addition to her working in the private sector, to a desire-based path that reduces the body to its material content and with the intention of taking revenge on the husband and proving the possibility of change. However, after the surgery, an unfulfillable desire and aspiration was born to return to the past image, and its alternative was to reconcile with the past and change the course of this ongoing project.

note: The positive change that is ostensibly intended is the added value of meaning, which is given actual presence by a network that depicts the situation for itself.

5.3. The Discussing the results in light of the hypotheses:

Based on what we concluded by analyzing the interviews with Case (B) and Case (M) and the results of the qualitative analysis of the content of the L'Écuyer's Growth of Self-Perceptions (GPS) test for the two cases, we arrived at a set of results that we are discussing in light of the proposed hypotheses as follows:

5.3.1. The first partial hypothesis:

Recalling the first hypothesis: Changes occur in women's personal self-image after plastic surgery.

- There are positive changes in the personal self-image in general in the first case (b), as her perception is based on her body and her feelings towards it in a way that is different from the negative form that she intended towards herself. Penaud et De Mortillet (2013) found an improvement in mood and feelings. After plastic surgery; The self-satisfaction index shows a temporary or incomplete positive change, meaning that it can be pushed towards surgical change again. This is the same as the findings of Asimakopoulou et al (2020), which showed an improvement in the perception of the body and external appearance after plastic surgery and an achievement of self-satisfaction, which plays a clear role in the success of the surgery or not.
- There are changes in the personal self-image in the second case (M) after plastic surgery, as the latter caused confusion and blurring between apparent satisfaction with the new look and

a feeling of loss and regret over the choice of surgery after realizing the irreversible change that occurred, after the situation was before surgery. The beautician is stably self-satisfied with her body and her perceived self.

According to the discussion of the first partial hypothesis with the information obtained from the two cases, we find that the first partial hypothesis “changes occur in a woman’s personal self-image after plastic surgery” is verified. This is the same result reached by the study of Kazeminia et al (2023), which observed a change in the way the person perceives his body and himself, noting some differences in the results in terms of improvement or negative change. Castle et al (2002) found that most plastic surgery applicants felt better about themselves.

5.3.2. The second partial hypothesis:

Recalling the second hypothesis: Changes occur in women's social self-image after plastic surgery.

- There are positive changes in the social self-image of the first case (b), as the case realizes the change resulting from plastic surgery in the perception and view of others of her and the position in which she believes they have placed her. This is consistent with the findings of the study by Nikolic et al (2013). Cosmetic surgery creates a stronger feeling of attractiveness and less shyness in the presence of others - especially men - and also facilitates finding a partner, and this is what was achieved in the case; However, these changes appear incomplete, as after the surgery the case maintains an intersubjective distance between itself and the other self, and at the same time it still perceives its image of itself socially, that is, from non-self-sources.

There are changes caused by plastic surgery to the social self-image of the second case (M), which appear in the form of distortion and instability between what the case sees and perceives in herself and what others perceive of her, especially her husband. Cosmetic surgery, as Rita Davai (2018) found, was a way to seek marital satisfaction; Instability also appears between her admiration for the change and the subsequent compliments and restoration of trust, and the feeling of amputation and inferiority because her intention for plastic surgery does not stem from her own values. This result, as Rita Davai (2018) reported, is one of the results of plastic surgery, and it represents the body becoming a means by which it fulfills the desires and aspirations of others.

On this basis, it can be said that the second partial hypothesis, which states: “Changes occur in women’s social self-image after plastic surgery,” has been verified. This change remains within the limits of what the other wants the woman to be, which is the reason for her criticism of her body and her search to change it because she perceives it as if the defects in it mean that she no longer belongs to the rest of society. (Espinoza, 2012)

5.3.3. The third partial hypothesis:

Recalling the third hypothesis: Changes occur in women's ideal self-image after plastic surgery.

- There were changes in the image of the ideal self in the first case (B). These changes did not carry a negative or positive direction, but rather characterized the path of the project in which the case moved, that is, from one point to another point, while implicitly keeping open the option of performing plastic surgery again (incompleteness project).
- There are changes in the image of the ideal self in the second case (M). These changes appear in a confusing and fluctuating manner between the desire to return to the past, that is, the image of the previous ideal self, and looking forward to the future with a new path in the image of the ideal self and an attempt to achieve the path of this ongoing project (with the case’s desire to... Continue the clinical interview). This is consistent with the results of the study by Bolgrave and Najadi (2018), which found that plastic surgery is a desire for a better life.

Based on the information obtained about the two cases using the interview and test tools that were analyzed, we concluded that the third partial hypothesis, which states: “Changes occur in a woman’s ideal self-image after plastic surgery” is met. It remains as stated in the result of the study by Ashikali et al (2017), which stated that plastic surgery is less beneficial than achieving the ideal image that the condition carries or is exposed to.

5.4. The General analysis of the results:

Recalling the general hypothesis: Changes occur in women's self-image after plastic surgery. Based on our field study, which dealt with research on “the self-image of women after plastic surgery,” we reached a set of results based on the analysis of interviews with the two cases and the analysis of the information provided in L’Écuyer’s test of the emergence of self-perceptions, in light of the “phenomenological” approach. These results are represented by

the fact that after a woman undergoes plastic surgery, her self-image undergoes a number of different changes.

The study concluded that there was a change after plastic surgery in the way the two subjects perceived their physical characteristics and in their feelings directed toward the self. While she achieves temporary self-satisfaction, as is the case with (B), or it appears unstable, as is the case with (M), which is the same as the results of the study of Asimakopoulou et al (2019), which confirmed that there are changes that occur after the operation at the level of perception of the condition of her body and satisfaction. The self and feelings have reached the conclusion that a positive change occurred in most cases in three feelings directed towards the self: feelings of confidence, attraction and admiration. This positive change did not appear in a number of cases. The feelings in which the change appeared varied in the results of the study. Espinoza (2012), which represented a change in the level of feeling unhappiness, ugliness, and the feeling of hating a specific part or organ of the body; In general, we conclude that there is a discrepancy in the changes that occur in a woman's personal self-image after plastic surgery. These changes were positive in the first case, and blurry in the second case. We find here a convergence with the results of Kam et al (2022) study, which found that psychologically healthy plastic surgery patients benefited best from plastic surgery compared to those with disturbed or confused images and those suffering from psychological distress, as they did not report improvement after surgery.

The study found that after plastic surgery women receive special appreciation and status. The changes lie in the positive impact on the woman's social self-image, as is the case in the first case (b), or in creating instability and apparent contradiction between self-values and non-self-values, which in turn affects its changes. By causing distortion and instability in the social self-image, as is the case with the second case (M). This is what Castle et al (2002) reported in the results of the study, where negative consequences appear for those who seek plastic surgery and seek it as a solution to life problems and external factors such as relationships and status.

The study concluded that there was fulfillment of the woman's desires (her short-term goals) from plastic surgery, which were to obtain a husband in the example of the first case, and symbolic revenge on the husband and regain trust in the example of the second case, while the aspirations (long-term goals remain) continue unfulfilled, and the changes in them It is at the level of its path, that is, in the directions and points at which the ideal self-image

continues as an incomplete project, which appears in the first case in leaving the possibility of resorting to plastic surgery open again, and in the second case in fluctuation and confusion between returning to the past image or reconciling with it and starting a path. new; The results of our study in this regard (the fulfillment of desires and aspirations) are consistent with what was reported in the study (Gimlin, 2002, p. 107), as it confirms that the cases of women studied by the study succeeded in achieving their short-term goals of plastic surgery, but their goals are long-term. It remained unrealized and contributed by its unrealized to the reproduction of cosmetic culture, that is, the repetition of plastic surgery, in other words.

Based on what was stated in the presentation and discussion of the results, based on interviews with the two cases and conducting the test “The emergence of self-perceptions of L’Écuyer”, the general hypothesis which states: “Changes occur in women’s self-image after plastic surgery” is verified. This is consistent with the findings of the study by Honigman et al (2004), which is a review of a number of studies related to examining the results of plastic surgery, which found noticeable changes on the general psychological and psychosocial levels - image in particular - which may move towards a positive, cautious or negative path.

In the end, it can be said that the study achieved the goals it was intended to study and reached a set of results that remain relative due to the specificity of the cases and the specificity of the topic. This is the same observation that was mentioned in the results of the study by Kam et al (2022), which confirmed that the results cannot be generalized about the effects and consequences. Psychological effects resulting from plastic surgery because it is not limited to specific thoughts and feelings, just as a single organ is not the image as a whole or the body as a whole.

Conclusion:

Despite the high rate of demand for plastic surgery, and although it is no longer a secret topic, and is no longer limited to a specific group of society, women who have had plastic surgery still refuse to talk about the subject completely. This may seem normal if it is for the sake of maintaining privacy; However, in many cases, many psychological problems are hidden behind it, including a distorted self-image, which makes us ask a new question: Does a woman’s refusal to talk about having plastic surgery have anything to do with her perception of her self-image? This shows us the depth of the problem in studying self-image. After plastic surgery. In the subject of our study, “Women’s self-image after plastic surgery,” we

studied two cases who had the courage to speak out. Therefore, it is useful to make a recommendation to conduct deeper studies on the topic of the impact of plastic surgery. In addition to studies showing the role of the psychologist in the medical consultation process before plastic surgery, doctors often do not take into account the psychological aspect when requesting plastic surgery. Only a small group of them consider psychological evaluation an essential step that must be taken, and they request a psychological report before the surgical procedure.

The necessity of joint work between plastic surgeons and psychologists before performing any operation is necessary, on the one hand, to determine the psychological profile of cases undergoing plastic surgery, and on the other hand, to determine their psychological eligibility to undergo surgery or not. The doctor must work with the outcomes of the clinical psychological interviews and the findings of the psychological evaluation, and adhere to this, especially with cases suffering from psychological disorders, including disorders related to an imbalance in self-image, for which it is not recommended to perform surgery before providing the necessary psychological care.

On the other hand, we find that studying the request for plastic surgery is one of the necessary matters that some doctors ignore. Ascertaining the real motive behind the request gives us indications about the psychological state that the condition will be in after the operation. According to studies, it has been shown that most of the cases that had plastic surgery were for social reasons, or Cultural, or even for fleeting goals, did not reach satisfactory results and did not reach the image they wanted. Such cases are often in a state of identification with the other, and are unable to see themselves except through the other. Therefore, ensuring the subjectivity of the cases is intended for surgery. Cosmetic surgery, and it is mandatory to conduct an interview with a psychologist before and after surgery, so that the condition can realize itself, and thus achieve psychological compatibility and adaptation to oneself and to others.

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