

The Hidden Dimension of Cosmetic Surgery Among Women: Romantic Recognition

Bitá Behravan

Universität Duisburg-Essen, Fakultät für Bildungswissenschaften, Institut für Psychologie,
Germany

bita.behravn@uni-due.de

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Abstract. Cosmetic surgery, its prevalence among women and the reasons why they choose to do such a risky, expensive and painful procedure had been a matter of research recently. Technology had made it easier for women to change their appearance quickly and almost permanently. Iran is a country in which cosmetic surgery had become very common. The intention behind such behavior is of importance since it can help women to reflect on their will to undergo cosmetic surgery. Regarding this, an interview with women who had different kinds of cosmetic was conducted ($N=10$). To get an overview about the surgeon's notion, an interview with a plastic surgeon was also conducted. The interview questions were basically directed toward their most important motivation of undergoing cosmetic surgery, the notion of women toward beauty, its importance in life, its role in romantic relationships and its probable effects on men's faithfulness. This qualitative research is based on the open questions and answers that the interviewees freely talked about. The results can partly show the hidden motivations and intentions that volunteers of these surgeries have. They are the intentions that normally are not talked about and are hidden behind the surface reasons.

Introduction

On a September day 2016, while standing at women's wagon in subway (the subway wagons are segregated in Iran) in Tehran, I observed that out of 25 women who were standing in front of me, 12 had a nose surgery and this is only one example of millions Iranian women with cosmetic surgery. Some people in Iran borrow money to undergo cosmetic surgery and it is not a cheap procedure. The cost of rhinoplasty (nose job) ranges from 5-20 million Tomans (currency of Iran) which is equal to 1250-5000 Euros. This is when the average monthly income in Iran is about 250 Euros.

Cosmetic surgery has become a common phenomenon among individuals around the globe and specifically among women. Even though no verified statistics are available, Iran is a country in which a lot of cosmetic surgeries (especially rhinoplasty) are taking place every day. The Guardian (2013) mentions that according to the survey of John Hopkins University and Iran's Rhinology research society the number of people undergoing rhinoplasty is seven times more in Iran than in America per capita. The reason that statistics are not available is because a lot of cosmetic surgeons in Iran are in fact practicing the field without holding a certificate to do so. In International Survey on Aesthetic/Cosmetic (ISAPS, 2016) the estimated number of plastic surgeons in Iran is 240, who have the permission and qualification to do cosmetic surgery while the Guardian (2013) mentions that more than 7000 people are operating for cosmetic purposes, even in the accuracy of the latter number there is a lot of doubt because the number of practitioners doing this procedure seems to be much higher than 7000. It is also to be mentioned that some girls in Iran undergo cosmetic surgery in very young ages for example when they are only 15 years old. This can also show that there are surgeons who do not care about the age of volunteers and they would do the procedure anyway.

I have personally seen that sometimes when a woman in a peer group has this surgery other girls get motivated to have the same surgery and they do it. This very intense competition among women is now happening which has turned into a social madness, a small wave that had more or less started in the past 20 years is now extended so drastically that is covering the whole society. Having

various kinds of cosmetic surgery can be seen among all ranges of age, families and economic statuses.

Seeing all this rush to get almost all kinds of surgeries in Iran raised the question “why do women do this?”

This common social trend aroused the question of the real and the probable hidden reasons that can actually motivate women to do such a risky, expensive and hard procedure. There are many researches that can give different and interesting ideas about the probable motivation behind cosmetic surgery and the theoretical part of this study introduces the most important concepts.

Theoretical Background

Undergoing cosmetic surgery can be explained by a lot of reasons which most of them are interrelated. As Ajzen (1985) mentions, there is an intention behind every behavior and behaviors are done for a reason. Clear and external Motivations such as gaining more beauty just for the sake of beauty can lead us to see deeper intentions such as having a higher self-confidence and as a consequence attracting others' attention who give positive feedbacks to these women, and at times getting the approval of romantic partners.

The cultural and societal demands are other factors that can motivate women to undergo cosmetic surgery and in this specific cultural context (Iran), being raised as a woman from whom one of the societal demands is being pretty, could also be another probable motivation to fulfil the expectations of the culture. . Dion, Berscheid and Walster (1972) first introduced the stereotype “what is beautiful is good” and this stereotype has been applied in many different social situations; e.g. attractive persons are more desirable as dating partners (Sigal & Ostrove, 1975). More recently researchers like (Aharon et al. 2001; O’Doherty et al. 2003) claim that beauty stimulates human rewarding center, also Kalick (1987) talks about the advantages that being attractive can have in private and professional life.

It has always been said not to judge a book by its cover but it is not a very practical proverb indeed since individuals are judged by the first boldest thing that can be seen in them and that is “the way they look”.

In the following part of the theory the hypothesized motivations will be introduced separately and their relation to each other are shown.

Beauty

The importance of physical attractiveness in first impression has been documented in number of studies. Dion, Berscheid and Walster (1972) found general agreement for the assumptions that attractive persons have more socially desirable personality traits, obtain more prestigious occupations, competent spouses, and happier marriages. The stereotype: “beautiful is good” was coined by these three researchers and is actually applied in many different social situations; e.g. attractive persons are more desirable as dating partners (Sigal & Ostrove, 1975), get better grades in school (Allen, 1976), and are judged as more talented and more qualified (Rich,1975). Stereotypes have direct implications for first impression and for broader personal and social evaluation The statement of “what is beautiful is good” simply links beauty and goodness and suggests that attractive individuals generally have more positive personal qualities for example self-confidence. According to the previous research and history, beauty has always been praised and somehow even worshiped throughout the history of mankind to the extent that beauty had been associated with pureness and ugliness had been associated with evilness and demons during the ancient Greek times. In ancient Greece beauty was always praised, Aristotle even said that beauty is the gift of God (Synnot, 1990). The association of beauty and goodness can also create this idea that once we become attractive we will be wanted more by society. The very idea of getting positive feedbacks from different individuals in varied societal environments because of “being attractive” might create the notion that beauty can help increase the self-confidence due to being wanted more in society.

In the 20th century especially in the recent decades there have been many changing descriptions for “beauty”. In an overall view beauty has been explained as a worldly versus spiritual, relative versus absolute, detailed versus general and most important inner versus outer element, and also described as a combination of components such as body, cosmetic, clothing and attractiveness (Synnot,1990). This approach emphasizes on the aspects that can be accumulated, gained or nurtured hence, the emphasis on natural beauty has diminished. This change in interpreting beauty along with industrial and medical development has caused beauty to be not just a natural and biological element but also to become something that can be obtained (Webster & Driskel, 1983). Gimlin (2001) argued that plastic surgery worked on women’s desire for constant “enhancement” rather than radical “transformation” or “alteration” to meet norms of beauty. Beauty is relative; the standards of beauty have changed throughout the history of humans. Famous pictures of Venus (Goddess of Beauty) painted by well-known painters represents a totally different concept of beauty in old times. The concept of beauty changes through time and within different cultures. Cash and Pruzinsky (2004), mention that there are cultural variations in appearance preferences. Therefore, being born in a specific society with a specific culture can lead individuals to internalize a specific form of beauty and consequently to follow the norms of beauty that the society introduces and demands.

Iran is a country in which there are specific codes that define beauty such as having long hair, full lips, small noses, etc. These norms of beauty are internalized by the paintings of well-known painters, poems of famous poets and finally families. When a society is demanding women to “be” pretty there is no surprise why Iran has the highest rank of having nose jobs in the world (The Guardian, 2013). Therefore the concept of beauty could be one of the main reasons why Iranian women conform to whatever can make them beautiful.

The context

Before we elaborate on other factors that can describe the reason for undergoing cosmetic surgery in the target context (Iran), the cultural and traditional does and don’ts along with the regulations to dress in public should be introduced. Iran is an Islamic Republic country in which according to rules women should wear hijab (Islamic cover on heads and long dresses to cover their legs and arms). This specific kind of covering up can and will put the faces and bodies in the background and instead of seeing a person’s appearance the first thing that can be seen is the scarf on the heads. This can be a reason why women wear a lot of make-up on their faces. Making the faces bold by cosmetics and also cosmetic surgeries seems to have become a popular way to make the faces bold. According to Cunningham (1986), men found faces without head scarf more attractive.

Schools in general are segregated in Iran, that means all boys and girls study in places where no opposite sex are and suddenly when they enter universities they encounter a totally new world in which boys and girls study together. This can make universities a run-way for showing their beauty to get picked soon by good-looking or rich boys. Since women really do not know how to deal with men they might assume that enhancing their beauty can be the best way to attract attention (a lot of girls undergo cosmetic surgeries when they enter universities). Having a poor self-confidence in communicating with the opposite sex can be a reason why women tend to undergo cosmetic surgery.

Self-confidence

Many researches have been conducted on this matter which claims that beauty and goodness are semantically reciprocal (Synnot, 1990). It means that both beauty and goodness have effect on each other. In this sense it can be assumed that there is a positive correlation between being beautiful and having a high self-confidence.

Cash and Pruzinsky (2002) state that “perceptions of what others think and prefer regarding physical appearance influence how we feel about our bodies” (p.115). Certainly the way we feel about our bodies has influence on self-confidence because our body is part of our self. Regarding

the positive feedbacks after the cosmetic surgeries, the feeling of oneself about one's appearance becomes better and this can boost self-confidence for a while. "For a while" because the feedbacks do not last forever and after a while habituation takes place. The individual herself gets habituated by her new appearance and others around her as well. Habituation is a form of where learning in which an organism decreases or ceases to respond to a stimulus after repeated presentations (Bouton, 2007).

Not getting the positive feedbacks and getting habituated to the new appearance can bring the individual to the place where she was standing before the surgery because it had not changed anything fundamentally. However, for the first years after cosmetic surgery a temporary self-confidence can be felt because of compliments that these women might receive from the environment. Also the idea that they will look good and attractive in the eyes of "others" that include their peers, partners, families and even strangers might be a very strong motivation for them to undergo such a procedure. The self-confidence makes individuals comfortable within themselves and this feeling can help them be more active in society and be more open to having communications with different people especially with men without being shy or feeling isolated that can be caused by the notion of being unattractive. This comes from the notion of Cash and Pruzinsky (2004), when they state that "body image attitudes are clearly related to individual's reported comfort and confidence in their social relations", (p. 280). Therefore, this self-confidence can help women to get the attention which they want to have.

Emotional Attachment /Attracting Attention

Behaviors to seek the attention of people typically have been named as "emotional dependence". It includes behaviors for reinforcers which can be provided by the receiving social response from other individuals like, behaviors used for seeking attention, approval, praise, love, closeness, feeling secure, and care (Gewirtz, 1954). This psychological dependency can be of uncertainty of being loved, poorly established identity, and self-criticism (Britchnel, 1984), Russianoff (1981) notes that these components are interrelated and aspects of female personality. The attitudes of dependence can be preserved through social interaction (Henderson & Cunningham, 1993). Being born and raised in a country that the role of men has been known as the "bread providers of family" might have been a strong attribute that had reinforced the characteristic of being dependent among women.

The components of a dependent personality are sometimes associated with feminine stereotypes in society (Broverman, Clarkson, Rosenkrantz, & Vogel, 1970). An independent woman in society with a good social class may also inhibit dependency traits toward her male partner (Primakoff, 1988; Siegel, 1988). This research can show that the role of woman as wives in ancient times and men as providers of the family had been deeply internalized throughout the history of human beings that even today women still tend to depend on male partners or at least pretend to be dependent on them. Seeking attention specifically of the male partners is also a matter of debate although it may sound very intense.

Bowlby (1977), states that the attachment system is the tendency of human beings to form emotional bonds with others. In the field of attachment Bortholomew and Horowitz (1991, cited in Cash and Pruzinsky 2004), have introduced four prototypes of personalities out of which the "preoccupied" prototype are the ones who feel worthless but seek for others attention and affection. As Cash and Pruzinsky (2004) state: "One can reasonably propose that attachment styles might have implications for body image experiences. Individuals who are insecure in attachment, whether due to self-perceived inadequacies or expectations of social rejections, may also be insecure about their physical worth and acceptability" (p.282).

Self-worth and self-confidence are also related to attention seeking Lack of self-confidence can cause individuals to seek attention from others. The need to be praised is also another motivation that women might have and this can show how self-worth depends on being praised by others. Getting positive feedback by others about their appearance can help individuals boost their self-confidence. "We are nervous about how others will evaluate the way we look, a passing comment

can either elevate or dampen our mood and self-confidence: Hearing “ You look great!”, we feel uplifted, our confidence renewed; hearing, “You look tired today”, we may feel more fatigued as well as self-conscious”(Cash & Pruzinsky, 2004, p. 108).

Since romantic partners spend a great deal of time together and share a lot with each other, it is likely that perceptions of partners about each other’s’ looks has a great influence on how they feel about themselves and their appearance. Since men put more emphasis on physical attractiveness of women (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2004).

This need to be praised can be explained in three ways according to Cash and Pruzinsky (2004) which are: reflected appraisal, feedback on physical appearance and social comparison. The reflected appraisal process suggests that the way we think people think about us or see us have an important effect on how we see or value ourselves. Feedback on physical appearance which may come from parents, siblings, peers, romantic partners or even complete strangers is absolutely important in perception of self and self-worth. Negative feedbacks may cause low self-esteem as positive ones may cause more self-confidence and positive mood. On the other hand there is a social comparison process, says that the comparison of physical appearance to others can cause upwards comparison, upwards social comparison is comparing oneself to an individual whom we perceive to be better than ourselves in any aspect. This discrepancy might encourage the feeling that makes people to strive to reach to the point where they feel as good as or even better than the subject of comparison.

Sense of Belonging

The belongingness hypothesis is that human beings have a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships. Satisfying this drive involves two criteria: First, there is a need for frequent, affectively pleasant interactions with a few other people, and, second, these interactions must take place in the context of a temporally stable and enduring framework of affective concern for each other's welfare (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p.17).

To keep this vital and fundamental sense of belonging with partner, females run toward cosmetic surgeons to fix the flaws they think they have in order to win their partner’s attention because of the body satisfaction that women think they might gain after their cosmetic surgery.

A lack of belongingness should constitute severe deprivation and cause a variety of ill effects. Furthermore, a great deal of human behaviour, emotion, and thought is caused by this fundamental interpersonal motive. This can to some extent explain why seeking partner’s attention, approval, love and care and sometimes trying to retrieve the lost affection back is the main and basic reason for undergoing surgery. Some may debate that instead of putting oneself under so much pressure and risk to gain the attention of the current partner back, it could be replaced by finding a new partner and ending the relationship in which the attention and affection is lost but as Baumeister and Leary (1995) mention: “We propose that the need to belong can, in principle, be directed toward any other human being, and the loss of relationship with one person can to some extent be replaced by any other. The main obstacle to such substitution is that formation of new relationships takes time, such as in the gradual accumulation of intimacy and shared experience. Social contact with a long-term intimate would therefore provide some satisfactions, including a sense of belonging that would not be available in interactions with strangers or new acquaintances”.

John Donne (1975, cited in Baumeister and Leary, 1995) has been widely quoted for the line "No [person] is an island." In psychology, the need for interpersonal contact was asserted in several ways by Freud (e.g., 1930), although he tended to see the motive as derived from the sex drive and from the filial bond Bowlby's (1977) attachment theory also posited the need to form and maintain relationships.

People prefer achievements that are validated, recognized, and valued by other people over solitary achievements, so there may be a substantial interpersonal component behind the need for achievement. And the needs for approval and intimacy are undoubtedly linked to the fact that

approval is a prerequisite for forming and maintaining social bonds, and intimacy is a denning characteristic of close relationships. The need to belong could thus be linked to all of them. There is a possibility that much of what human beings do is done in the service of belongingness.

Previous Research and Research Questions

The first thing to be remembered when undergoing cosmetic surgery is the desire to get (more) attractive and beautiful. My previous research which was a quantitative study consisted of 3 different questionnaires measuring the mental health, body image, and identity patterns of women with and without cosmetic surgery. There was no significant difference between these 3 variables among the two groups of study. The questionnaires could not show the motivation of these women or any probable difference between the two groups (Behravan, 2017; in preparation). To find out more about the intentions of women with cosmetic surgery a qualitative part was added to become clearer about the role of these 3 variables and the questions in the first interview were directed toward the mental health, body image, and identity patterns of these women. During this interview some hidden intentions were mentioned by the interviewees that encouraged me to question other possible motivations that the target group (women with cosmetic surgery) might have had to undergo such a procedure. During the interviews of the previous research all the interviewed women admitted that they underwent cosmetic surgery for the sake of beauty which means becoming more beautiful. However, beauty per se was not the only intention of these women as it was seen in the interviews and some subtle sentences were said about the partners that these women had. It later suggested the idea to study the intentions that were not said or talked about and this reason was the motivation to conduct the third study.

Method

The researcher decided to have specific interviews with women who had cosmetic surgery to be able to understand their motivations more deeply. In addition, a surgeon, Dr. “X” was interviewed in order to get a small overview of a male plastic surgeon about how he sees and interprets the reasons why he thinks women have to undergo cosmetic surgery.

Sample

There were 10 interviewees ($N=10$), all of them were women between 20-38 years old. These women were interviewed at a beauty clinic in Tehran and were chosen randomly. During the several visits to the clinic each subject who was willing to do an interview was chosen.

Level of Cases

The age, marital status, education, career and the number and kind of cosmetic surgeries of the subjects are shown in table 1. The surgeon was also interviewed for further information. He was 44 years old and had been practicing cosmetic surgery for 10 years, it has to be mentioned that he was a general surgeon without a certificate to do cosmetic surgery.

Table 1

Participant level of cases

| | Age | Marital status | Education/career | Cosmetic Surgery |
|-----------|-----|-------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------|
| Subject 1 | 35 | Married / has an affair | Highschool/ housewife | Buttocks/breasts |
| Subject 2 | 32 | divorced | Divorced/ make-up artist | Cheekbones/nose |
| Subject 3 | 29 | single | A level/unemployed | earlobe |

| | | | | |
|------------|----|----------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Subject 4 | 32 | single | Masters/self-employed | Lip augmentation |
| Subject 5 | 34 | single | Highschool/ kindergarten teacher | Chin/nose |
| Subject 6 | 38 | divorced | Highschool/housewife | Liposuction |
| Subject 7 | 21 | single | Bsc student/network manager | nose |
| Subject 8 | 20 | single | Bsc student/teacher | nose |
| Subject 9 | 22 | single | Bsc student/ unemployed | nose |
| Subject 10 | 22 | married | Highschool/housewife | Lip augmentation/ nose |

Setting

The interviews took place at a cosmetic surgeon's office (Dr. X) in a beauty clinic in Tehran. A quiet and isolated room was given to the researcher to have the interviews inside. The beauty clinic is located in the west of Tehran.

Duration of the Interviews

Each of the interviews took about 20-45 minutes depending on the elaboration of the answers. The researcher did not interrupt any of the interviewees to save time because the intention of the interviews were to find the hidden motivations of undergoing cosmetic surgery, and some of the interviewees needed more time to feel relaxed to open up and talk about their real and deeper motivations for undergoing cosmetic surgery.

The open questions of the interview

- 1- What was the strongest drive for you to undergo cosmetic surgery? Did you achieve what you wanted?
- 2- Is beauty important? If so, why?
- 3- Can beauty help women to find a good man or to maintain the relationships?
- 4- Can beauty bring back the faithfulness of men?
- 5- Please order these from the most to least important: Education, money, marriage, beauty, family.

Reasons to choose the items

Each and every item was chosen to dig deeper for the hidden motivations, to encourage the participants to talk more openly about their intentions and to figure out if attractiveness was important to these women, and if yes why? There was the assumption that there are some personal reasons than just having a distorted body image or having a specific kind of identity style, reasons that these women might not have been aware of consciously. Reasons that actually were personal and could not be understood simply by distributing some questionnaires, it felt needed to know about the probable hidden reasons and hear them saying why they chose to do such an expensive and yet risky procedure. Answering openly to the questions gave these volunteers the chance to go deeper in their reasons that had at some point led them to undergo cosmetic surgery. The last item of ordering the factors, education, money, marriage, beauty, family and health was chosen to see these women's priorities in life.

Analysis of Data

The analysis is based on the transcribed statements of the women who underwent at least one cosmetic surgery. An exploratory approach was preferred over a hypothesis-based approach. Thus

the present study used an exploratory approach in order to obtain further knowledge about women's intentions for cosmetic surgery (Creswell, 2014; Patton, 2002).

Results

Since the research is an exploratory one, the results are written on the basis of all answers that the participants gave which gave a lot of important ideas about the motivations they had that led them to undergo cosmetic surgery.

Table 2 shows the answers of participants to the questions and later on the discussion and interpretation of the results are shown.

Table 2

Answers to questions

| | What was the strongest motivation to undergo cosmetic surgery? | Is beauty important? Why? | Can beauty help women to find a good man to have relationship with? | Can beauty bring back the faithfulness of disloyal male partners? | Order in priority: Education, money, marriage, beauty, family |
|-----------|--|---|--|--|---|
| Subject 1 | Self-confidence/ boyfriend/look good | Yes/clearly seen/everyone loves it | No/maybe for first impression only | Not at all | Family/ money/ marriage/ education/ beauty |
| Subject 2 | Get pretty/husband encouragement | Yes/beautiful is good/gives self-confidence/ makes me feel good | No/I thought it could but my husband cheated | No/a cheater will cheat | Family/ money/ education/ marriage/ beauty |
| Subject 3 | Self-confidence/other people praise me | Yes/gives social advantages and self-confidence | Yes/I should be so pretty that my partner only looks at me | Not at all/men like beauty but not faithful for beauty | Family/ money/ education/ beauty /marriage |
| Subject 4 | Self-confidence/positive feedback from others | Yes/100% necessary for women/attract others /helps get married | Yes/it will finally help to marry rich men | Not at all | Family/ beauty/ education/ marriage/ money |
| Subject 5 | Get pretty/positive complements | Yes/everyone likes beauty/ have self-confidence | No/I feel sorry for myself to have thought so | Never/I feel sorry for those who think so | Family/ money/ education/ marriage/ beauty |
| Subject 6 | My husband to like me/attract husband's attention | Yes/gives confidence hence, social success | Yes/but for a short time it is effective | I don't know/ did not help me! | Education/ family/ marriage/ beauty/ money |
| Subject 7 | Self-confidence/get pretty /avoid getting mocked by peers | Yes/women must be pretty/ beauty is godly/ look good among peers is necessary | 100%/ men are only after beauty/ ex-partner came back after I did it | To some extent/men praise beauty | Marriage/ family/ money/ beauty/ education |
| Subject 8 | Look good in photos /get pretty/self-confidence | Yes/influence on almost everything/ first thing that is noticed | No/ understanding is important | I don't think so/although men are after beauty but beauty cannot keep them | Family/ marriage/ education/ beauty/ money |

| | | | | | |
|------------|---|---|---|---|--|
| Subject 9 | Get pretty/ have a nose like my peers | Yes/ first impression/ you will be judged better/I don't like unattractive people | Yes/men pick pretty ones first/ in the end it will help | No/but if my disloyal husband asks me to undergo surgery I will to save my relationship | Family/ money/ beauty/ education/ marriage |
| Subject 10 | Felt ugly/avoid getting mocked by friends/looking good in photos | Yes/for positive feedbacks/ increases self- confidence | Yes/in this era beauty is the main criterion to get picked by men | No/A cheater always cheats whether pretty or not | Family/ education/ beauty/ marriage/ money |

The Mantras

These interviews with 10 women who all had undergone at least one cosmetic surgery and were mostly in their 30's and 20'S gave the researchers a better insight to the unsaid motivations. A lot of sentences were said and repeated which were mostly like clichés or stereotypes that they actually believed in, and we call them “Mantras”. These Mantras were some key sentences and reasoning that were heard from almost all the interviewees and gave new insight to get to know the intentions that were never mentioned or talked about. These mantras were repeated for each question that was asked from the interviewees.

Everyone likes beauty/beauty for itself

The main motivation as mentioned by all the interviewees was to increase their beauty and to become pretty.

According to the interviewee number 1, beauty treats the eyes and no one escapes from a pretty face. She also mentioned: “as long as I am alive I should look pretty and I would do anything about it”.

Interviewee number 2 says that the main motivation to undergo cosmetic surgery was to get more beautiful and having an attractive and happy face, she specifically mentioned that what is beautiful is good and she enjoys looking at anything or anybody that looks pretty and being beautiful is important because it makes people feel better about themselves.

Subject number 3 says that beauty is important because when she talks to a pretty person she enjoys it, she clearly says that she enjoys talking to pretty people rather than average looking people. She also mentions that beauty has always helped her in finding a job and in society it had always been helpful for her to seek better opportunities.

Subject number 4 mentions that beauty is 100% important for women because it is necessary to be beautiful especially for women.

Subject number 5, says that the intention of going under surgery was to get more beautiful because she thought that if she were more beautiful she would become happier. She also mentions that beauty is good by itself and everybody simply loves beauty. She had thought that beauty could have helped her have a better situation in society.

Subject number 6 says that beauty is only 50% important in a woman's life and all the rest is about chance and behavior.

Subject number 7 said that the most important motivation was 100% to become more beautiful, and I enjoyed this beauty a lot.

Self-confidence and beauty

Another bold motivation that was repeated by the interviewees was to increase their self-confidence. Not having enough self-confidence and self-esteem was one of the main reasons which encouraged them to seek cosmetic surgery.

Subject number one who had two surgeries (first one reducing the size of her breasts and second one buttocks augmentation) stated that the main reason for her to undergo cosmetic surgery was that she did not have enough self-confidence. She later explained her lack of self-confidence by not being able to attend the society easily since her breasts were too big. She felt embarrassed to interact with others but now she can actually be present in society without being embarrassed of the size of her breasts. Consequently she claims that her self-confidence has increased.

Subject number 2 (with two surgeries first her cheek bones and second her nose) clearly states that being beautiful gives her self-confidence, she also said that she thought her confidence would go higher with the cosmetic surgeries and right after the surgeries for some months she was more confident but after a while everything went back to normal.

Subject number 3 (with one surgery on her earlobes) started the interview by saying that “my self-confidence was really low and I was always worried about my earlobes, I felt sad whenever somebody noticed the flaw in my earlobes”. She stated that beauty is important because it increases self-confidence in general.

Subject number 4 stated clearly that the main motivation was enhancing her self-confidence because on the whole she did not believe in herself and contrary to her expectation her self-confidence did not increase at all.

Subject number 5 stated that her self-confidence immediately increased after the cosmetic surgery but it faded after some years. “I think that women undergo the cut because of the lack of self-confidence and not believing in themselves”. She insisted that the hope of getting a high self-esteem is an illusionary reward of surgery that women expect to get but it only lasts for a couple of years. She states that no outer change can help us finding the real self-confidence.

Subject number 6 also states that her self-confidence has increased to some extent and she clearly relates beauty to self-confidence. According to her, beauty increases self-confidence and a high self-confidence can help people succeed in anything and being certain about all the things they intend to do. “Attractive people automatically have this self-confidence and I love it, the fact that I can fit in any clothes I try on gives me more self-confidence”.

Subject 8 said it was to get more self-confidence that actually made me undergo cosmetic surgery. For example I did not take pictures from every angle I was always conscious not to take pictures from my full face or my profile.

Reading and listening to all the comments on self-confidence among these women, raises another question that is “Does self-confidence make people feel beautiful or does beauty make people feel self-confident?”

Although the boldest and mostly the first intention to undergo cosmetic surgery which was mentioned by the interviewees was “beauty” or “self-confidence”, when we investigated deeper another motivation which was hidden under, came up, and that was things like “to attract my partner’s attention”, “to be praised”, “being approved” or “being loved (winning back the partners’ heart again)”.

Emotional Attachment/Attracting Attention

Interviewee number 1 talks about this intention like this: My boyfriend did not like big breasts and since I did not like my breasts I did the surgery and he became really happy. I wanted to look like Jennifer Lopez because my boyfriend loves her body. I wanted to look perfect for my boyfriend and wanted him to praise me”.

Interviewee number 2 claimed that the first surgery on her cheeks was her own idea but the second surgery was because her husband asked her to do so and she wanted to make him happy.

Interviewee number 3 clearly stated that she wanted all her partners’ attention on her and that she does not want her partner to look at other women and she wants all his attention on her, that’s why she always wants to look pretty.

Interviewee number 4 stated that beauty is important to attract attention in order to find better partners for marriage.

Interviewee 6 started the interview by saying: I did it in order that my husband likes me, the main reason was to attract my husband's attention because he does not like women with big bellies and he always nagged at me why I had gained so much weight. She also mentioned that she did this surgery to have a slim body in order that her husband would touch her again. And also she wanted others to praise her so that her husband would notice her again.

Subject number 6 clearly states that her identity is defined by having a man beside her.

Subject 7 stated that Yes beauty can, men are only after beauty they care about attraction so much, if a woman is prettier they will go after her.

Regarding this cognition the effort to seek the attention of the partner would become a very predictable action because when an individual defines her identity or at least part of her identity through the existence of someone else, losing the attention of that specific person may threaten her identity.

Regarding the notion of attracting attention she finally adds: „On the whole I think the main reason for me and others to undergo cosmetic surgery is attracting others attention and to look good in everyone's eyes to be praised all the time. The intention to gain my husband's attention was because I think I am nothing by myself and my identity is defined by having a man beside me”.

According to this it is not very surprising why women especially in Iran are trying to please their partners, as Iran is still a country which although women have moved toward independence and working in society in the recent decades but still the concept and internalized culture of “A man is the protector” strongly exists in the minds of Iranians.

An Image of an Iranian man Stereotype

The Mantra “Iranian men are so!” was heard a lot of times during the interviews.

Interviewee number 1 stated that beauty is very important for men and normally men like beautiful women. Beauty will not help women to maintain their relationships with men because after a while couples get used to each other's appearance. “My husband cheated on me before the cosmetic surgery and kept on cheating on me even after the surgery and did not show any interest on my body after the surgery”.

Interviewee 2 also stated the same thing that “my husband was really happy in the beginning but after a while he got used to it and I was proved that beauty could not save any relationship, it can never guarantee a man's faithfulness, I got divorced because my husband cheated on me with somebody who did not look as pretty as me”.

Subject number 3 clearly said that the behavior of men toward her changed even when she dresses up differently. She stated that beauty is 50% important in relationships, “I dyed my hair blond because my boyfriend asked me to do so, I think beauty is really important for him because men only see the appearance; and what they see is what they believe, I think their judgment is based only on the appearance of women, and specifically I mean Iranian men are like this; it does not matter which country they live in, I think Iranian men are always like this, but still beauty cannot guarantee a man's faithfulness”.

Subject number 4 told almost the same things: “I think finally women who work so hard on their appearance finally will be able to find men who are a bit older but financially in a good situation because men in our country are only looking for outer beauty especially the ones who are a bit older. Beauty cannot keep a man's faithfulness because if it was able to do so, then all beautiful women would have never been cheated on. Beauty can only be effective in the beginning to help us find a man with a good situation, but in the long term, it cannot help any relationship by itself.

Subject number 5 mentioned: “It cannot also guarantee men's faithfulness, and cannot fix anything, but there are a lot of women that have put themselves under the cut because they thought that cosmetic surgery could bring back their partners' attention or faithfulness and I know some of them, I also know that their husbands had not even noticed the change and had kept on cheating on the wife and ignoring the wife even after the surgery, my cousin is one of these poor women”.

Subject number 6 over this matter mentions: „I don't know if beauty can help at all or not, it did not help me in my relationship with my husband and although I went under the cut to make my relationship better it did not work out and I got really disappointed so I asked for a divorce after 6 months of my surgery and as you know we are divorced now.”

Subject 8 stated that unfortunately these days most young men care more about the beauty of women and it is not good at all because there are other more important things other than beauty.

Subject 10 in the end added that “but now a for lot of men especially in Iran “beauty” is the main criterion rather than other things such as personality or something”.

Not meeting the expectations

All interviewees stated that their expectation of increasing their self-confidence and maintaining their relationships did not meet.

Interviewee number 2 stated that for a few years after her cosmetic surgery she felt more confident and they had a better relationship specially because her husband knew that she had done her second surgery (nose) for her only , “but beauty could not save my relationship in long term and he went after another woman who was not even good-looking, I was young and naive and I thought that beauty was the key to make me happy but as I aged I realized that beauty was not even slightly as important as I thought it was”.

Interviewee number 5 gave a very direct notion about what she now thinks about the role of beauty in her life. „I am sorry for myself, because I thought beauty could increase my self-confidence, this beauty may be helpful for a couple of months and tops for a year but after a year or so, beauty cannot help at all after a while. And the reason I thought this way was only because I did not have any experience in the society.”

Another noticeable matter which was seen among the interviews was the fact that mostly the families especially the parents of the participants were totally against the idea of their daughters to undergo cosmetic surgery.

Subject number one states that her family told her not to do the surgery and also her husband told her not to do it but she did not listen to them and she underwent the surgery because of her current boyfriend.

Subject number 2 stated that her mother and father told her not to do the nose job but she underwent the cosmetic surgery because of her husband.

Subject number 5 also mentioned that her parents fully disagreed with both of her cosmetic surgeries and they did not even support her financially to do the procedures nonetheless, she did the cosmetic surgery twice.

Subject number 6 also stated that her parents were extremely against both her cosmetic surgery but she did it because she wanted to look more beautiful.

Family

Almost all participants said that their families (parents) disagreed with them to undergo cosmetic surgery by not supporting them emotionally or financially. Families were scared of health risks of their daughters undergoing cosmetic surgery. Almost all subjects except 2 of them put their families first when ordering their priorities. This obviously has conflict with what they did. In the discussion part this will be elaborated more.

Interview with the plastic surgeon

The Iranian surgeon was very welcoming and friendly. He gave a lot of interesting insights on why women do this process very often and extremely in Iran. He started his talks by saying that no human is living in an isolated island alone and since individuals are surrounded by a social atmosphere they also tend to follow the trends which are common in the society. This can also be related to the concept of sense of belonging in a broader area than just partners which is the society.

He also mentioned that beauty by itself is an important matter and everyone wants to be beautiful and it is also very important how they look in the eyes of others, because we are living together in a big society, and the society is part of our identity.

Another important factor that he talked about was that women want to be outstanding and this can be done in two ways. One is to educate themselves and become successful in society and the other one is remaining beautiful by undergoing surgery, “many women choose the second option because it is faster and much easier”.

A very interesting reason that he pointed to was the fact that Iranian women are obliged to wear Hijab, he elaborated: “and as a doctor I know that cosmetic surgery on the nose is really prevalent here since the face has become the most important element in appearance of Iranian women, other parts of the body in women is not clearly seen in this society due to what they should wear in public. In other countries women can look pretty by only having a fit body or a flat belly but here in Iran only the face can be shown to others in public that’s why women wear too much make up or have operation normally on their faces.”

The doctor also mentioned that it is very normal for men to follow beautiful women and therefore women must always be pretty if they want their partners to remain loyal. “I think it is really important for a woman to look pretty and sexy, in the modern world if a woman does not enhance or care about her appearance her partner will definitely leave her, because there are a lot of rivals for a married woman in our society which means there is always the probability of another woman taking the wife’s place and if the man is not so busy with his job and has enough time, he will start to look for the pretty and sexy ones and if his wife does not do anything about her looks the man will leave and go for other options so, women must care about their body and appearance all the time, and a wise married woman must do sports and try not to get fat at all in order to prevent getting ugly, or if she is already fat or has a big nose or something appalling in her body or face she should undergo cosmetic surgery to fix that part”.

Discussion

It is not strange that women are constantly running toward cosmetic surgeons to change their looks to satisfy their partners, studies have shown that body or appearance satisfaction among partners can improve relationships (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2004). But the interviews can show quite the contrary which means that the relationships did not improve after the cosmetic surgeries. This can perfectly show that undergoing cosmetic surgery cannot change the perception of our bodies (body image) permanently and if any change takes place it would only be temporary. Interviewees who underwent cosmetic surgery specifically to gain their partners attention back, all felt dissatisfied for their expectation was not fulfilled.

Women with desperate relationships were all uncertain about the assumption that beauty would bring the unfaithful partner back but somehow they did it when they felt endangered and did not achieve what they wished for.

On the other hand the so called motivations such as being praised or attracting attention were at some point linked to winning the unfaithful partner’s heart again or finding a partner for the single ones. From every angle that I went through the actual motivation was to please men. If the stereotype of Iranian men which Iranian woman describe is actually correct then it can be discussed that women feel the urge to be constantly attractive in order not to lose their men or to find a good one. This assumption can also be slightly felt in the statements of Doctor X.

The statements that Doctor X made about women and men is a very small example of a typical Iranian man view point of women, which can show why women in Iran has the Mantra of “Iranian men are so” if this cognition is common and internalized in the whole society behaviors like this which represent a beauty contest should be expected.

As it is clearly seen in all the interviews all these women stated that Iranian men are always looking for pretty faces but after a while they become used to beautiful faces and they are not faithful. The sentence “beauty can never guarantee a man’s faithfulness” was heard repeatedly and

with a lot of emphasis from all the interviewees. This raises the question that if women know the fact that beauty cannot guarantee a relationship, then why do they go after it while their main and hidden intention is to attract men's attention?

There is a common belief among Iranian women that Iranian men are so much into looks and women are judged by men through the way they dress up, their bodies and faces. This gives the notion of being passive as women, the notion that says: you will be chosen so, be beautiful to be chosen by better men. Blum (2003) also mentions that women want beauty as a means to certain ends, Freud (cited in Blum 2003) describes beautiful women as "love objects" since they have the greatest fascination for men. Beauty on the other hand brings more various benefits available; more financially successful partners and the material pleasures they bring. The competition of winning rich and successful men's heart seems to be so much common these days among women of Iran, a vital concept that encourages them to spend lots of money on their appearance and taking the risks of these cosmetic surgeries.

It was also seen in the interviews that most of the parents did not approve of undergoing cosmetic surgery for their daughters. Disagreement of parents and family does not seem to have had that much of effect on undergoing cosmetic surgery, and from the perspective of the interviewees the idea of the partners seemed to be much more important than what the family (parents) tell them.

Different people can have important roles at varied periods during our life. For example parents have the most vital effect on children while, the adolescents are mostly affected by the influence of their friends and peers about their appearance and adults are likely influenced more by their partners since they are the central source of feedback and support (Cash & Pruzinsky, 2004).

Based on this theory the romantic partners have the most effect on adult women, this influence is much more than the effect of families that they were born and raised in. This could be because romantic partners are together for a longer time, experience a lot of things together and their intimacy is of course much more than what individuals experience with their family members e.g., parents and siblings. Due to this, paying more attention to what romantic partners ask us than the families is very likely and predictable.

The wish to have a higher self-confidence was also revealed to have another reason which was "attracting attention". The feeling of emptiness and being dependent on a male figure through which women can define their identity could be the trigger for showing and having tendencies of seeking attention to reciprocate the frustration they might have inside. This attention seeking behavior is manifested through heavy make-ups, doing every possible way to look better in other people and specifically in men's eyes.

Conclusion

As it was discussed a lot of factors were the bold reasons why these women underwent cosmetic surgery. An interrelated web which is like a circle of important components and each and every component is related to the other one have made a special form of motivation for the Iranian women. Iranian women on one hand are dealing with their everyday problems in the society and struggling to achieve a better situation which can give them a better and more independent societal position and on the other hand are stuck with the generalized and internalized false cognitions that the culture and tradition had given them. This fact must be considered that although they might even have their own social position and status, it takes a while to realize this matter that their self-worth and self-confidence is and will not be defined through the partners they have. Normally each person, considering the studying period and having experience at their job would achieve the desired position in late twenties and over in general. By this time women who are volunteers for cosmetic surgery had already undergone it and the procedure is already finished. It is time to educate women to start believing in themselves to increase their self-worth and self-confidence by internal abilities and educations. The false internalized cognition is really hard to be removed or changed but this social insanity is affecting the society very severely and unless something is actually done about it, this will continue and get worse than what it actually is.

Aside from gaining the social status and considering it as a main factor for self-worth the false cognition that beauty can guarantee a better relationship with partners seems to be a big motivation for women who do this. After undergoing a cosmetic surgery and finding out that beauty is not a solution for relationship issues they normally feel empty and frustrated because the effort did not meet the expectation. Since this effort was such a hard and risky one, the frustration of not meeting the expectation increases. In this case it is helpful when women are educated about the fact that problems like this will only be solved if they seek a marriage counsellor's advice or go to a therapist. The temporary attention that men pay to pretty women could result in a false cognition that attractiveness can bring back the lost attention. Thus, some women actually underwent cosmetic surgery to please their partners.

Finding a better option for partnership is also another hope that women have which later becomes a strong motivation for single women to undergo such surgeries. Watching pretty girls getting married to rich and prestigious men may cause a lot of females to undergo surgery in order to be picked and chosen by more successful men. The culture in a country like Iran is that in the beginning of a relationship women are picked and men choose. Therefore, if more men are willing to choose a woman as a partner, she has more options to choose the best one out of all.

From the cultural point of view we can also say that beauty had been and is praised throughout the history of the world and especially in Iran. The paintings of Iranian women with long black hair, rosy lips and small noses (Miniatures) which represent an ideal Iranian woman figure can speak for themselves how much a special manifestation of female beauty is praised in this society. Also having great poets like Hafez or Saadi during the fourteenth and thirteenth century who had always praised the beauty of women in their poems is another proof that shows the importance of beauty within the Iranian culture. No wonder why everyone wants to be pretty. Being brought up in a culture like this and hearing statements such as "A woman's investment is her beauty" or "Woman means beauty" will probably have the consequence that women start to compete with each other to get more beautiful and since technology had made it easier for them by offering cosmetic surgery, no wonder why more and more women are rushing toward cosmetic surgeons every day.

In the end and after hearing these women I came to the conclusion that it is much better if women who want to undergo any cosmetic surgery should be interviewed and asked for their intention in order to find out the real motivations. They can be stopped to do so if they actually realize that their motivation will not be fulfilled by undergoing cosmetic surgery.

Limitations of the Study

The researcher had a lot of difficulties in finding a cosmetic surgery clinic to do the interviews. Some surgeons do not want to lose their patients because they do not trust such investigations. I suggest that there should be permission for researchers on this matter to be able to gather data more easily. Not being able to find many places to conduct the interview resulted in having smaller samples. Therefore, conducting a more extended research would become almost impossible in this field of study. Further studies are also suggested regarding the well-being and attachment system of women who are volunteers for undergoing cosmetic surgeries.

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