The Patients of Plastic Surgery

Many issues today revolve around a very new, and very dangerous perception. It is a perception that has altered the view of beauty and created new goals and unreachable expectations. In order to strive for beauty, one must also strive for perfection. We have entered this era, where most of the population strictly defines themselves through physical appearance. This new ideology of obtaining the perfect physical form in deed consumes most minds, sometimes without any fault of their own. The media and societal standards do not help the notion that, “If only I had a smaller nose, a slimmer waist, or larger breasts, I would be happy ”. Sadly this way of thinking is much more common than it should be. Most people are not aware of the direct results with this type of obsession, or what it ultimately leads to. Besides the multiple psychological effects, what seems to be the most socially acceptable is in fact, plastic surgery. Plastic surgery is the face of this newly distorted era, and has been the tempting means of achieving flawless beauty by many. The dividing lines between plastic surgery patients however, are truly intriguing. So who are these patients?

There are many different reasons for why people chose to go under the knife, and these differences can be split into two categories. One is known as cosmetic surgery, and the other, reconstructive surgery. According to Dr. Antell’s definition, “Cosmetic surgery is performed to reshape normal structures of the body in order to improve the
patients appearance and self-esteem.” This type of trivial surgery is one of the most predominant results of our over-superficial society. It also differs greatly from reconstructive surgery, since “it is performed on abnormal structures of the body, caused by congenital defects, developmental abnormalities, trauma, infection, tumors or disease.” There is a clear distinction between the two categories, but what about other factors. Should anyone be allowed to get plastic surgery?

Before focusing on the obvious negatives of plastic surgery, let us not forget the good that comes of it. Reconstructive surgeries are possibly the most beneficial of all plastic surgeries. They are performed about one million times a year and are very valuable to patients of all ages and types. No one is excluded from these procedures, in fact surgeries could include a child with a birth defect, a young adult injured in an accident, or an older adult with a problem caused by aging (ASPS). The purpose of these surgeries is to generally improve function and aid in creating a normal appearance. Some common examples of congenital abnormalities are birthmarks; cleft-lip and palate deformities; hand deformities such as syndactyly (webbed fingers), or extra or absent fingers; and abnormal breast development (ASPS). The surgeries done in order to fixed these abnormalities would improve the patients overall function and would also assist the patient in living a normal life. The top five reconstructive surgeries performed in 2005 were tumor removal, laceration repair, scar revision, hand surgery, and breast reduction (ASPS). Reconstructive surgery is valuable for these types of patients because of the fact that they are not operating on normal, functional parts of the body, but instead abnormalities. There is an obvious difference between patients that go to plastic surgeons
for a tummy tuck and those going for a clef-lip; this is also why there is divide between these two categories.

Although plastic surgery in itself is socially condoned, there are still variations of acceptability. We are a society that does not tolerate suffering in any forms, and so we find ways to alleviate it. Since reconstructive surgery is often for patients suffering from a disease or abnormality, society looks it as a necessity. Plastic surgery can promote a better well being for these patients, and help establish a firmer self-esteem, so therefore it is acceptable.

However the patients of plastic surgery are still under a great divide. Not only is plastic surgery divided into two categories, reconstructive and cosmetic, but also age is starting to be taken into account. In the reconstructive world age is not an issue, but in the cosmetic world it is still controversial. Many people are not aware of the people that are now introducing themselves to cosmetic surgery. Plastic surgery is in fact more outrageously popular than ever, and it is affecting new ages in society. The fact is it has hit an entirely new generation. Years ago we would never have thought that instead of graduation money, teenage girls would be offered plastic surgery. Mary Powers notes in her article "I've seen several patients recently who received breast implants as high school graduation gifts," said Dr. Dan H. Shell III, a plastic surgeon in Memphis, Tenn. Graduation presents and birthday gifts have been taken to a whole new level. A realm that society helped created.

Plastic surgery is no longer marketing exclusively to older individuals, but instead is focusing on the younger generation. In fact the number of adolescent cosmetic procedures is on the rise. “According to the ASPS, over 333,000 people 18 years and
younger had plastic surgery in 2005, up from about 306,000 in 2000” (Hirsch). Although statistic-wise it is only a slight increase, 11% of those surgeries were for “sexy” procedures such as breast augmentations, tummy tucks, and liposuction. (Hunker). Paula Gray Hunker notes in her article titled “Pressure to be Perfect,” that things have changed- “according to William Little, a plastic surgeon in Washington. “Now we’re seeing teens who are looking for a quick fix to their problems. The girl who says ‘I’m a bit overweight, and why should I exercise or diet when I can just get it sucked out?’” Plastic surgery may seem like a quick alternative to diet and exercise, but it certainly is not the safest method, especially for teens. Teenagers do not realize that their body still undergoes changes, and just because legally they are considered adults at the age of eighteen, doesn’t mean that physically they are adult. The attitude developing around cosmetic procedures, as a “quick fix” is the dangerous way of thinking that most people get sucked into. Which is precisely why these types of surgeries still continue. According to Denis Mann in his article titled “Is plastic surgery a teen thing?,” "In places like Brazil, the use of cosmetic surgery is fairly common, especially among beauty pageant contestants. For example, Juliana Borges, 22, the new Miss Brazil, had plastic surgery four times and underwent 19 smaller cosmetic procedures. Borges had liposuction, chin surgery, fixed her nose and ears, and also had breast implants (Mann). It’s very interesting to know that in today’s society, competing with the looks you were born with just isn’t good enough anymore. Whose fault is it? "We live in a culture that emphasizes competition and legitimizes self-improvement as a way to gain a competitive edge and plastic surgery lives up to its expectations” (Mann). It’s upsetting to see young girls that are in the prime of their lives, competing with perfection. Society sets the rules on what is acceptable and
what is considered to be taboo, and apparently this specific group of cosmetic patients is socially tolerable.

Plastic surgery occupies our society, and has shifted its original concept of reconstruction, into being necessary means of achieving perfection. The true importance of plastic surgery has been lost due to society’s pervasive expectations. Reconstructive surgery and cosmetic surgery are without a doubt two dividing lines in the plastic surgery world. Whether or not we continue to live in a dangerous realm of twisted motivations, we still must realize that patients of plastic surgery come in all forms. Some seek surgery to help congenial defects and abnormalities, while others search for alluring aspect of perfection. Needless to say these two varieties of patients are the great divide behind the realm of plastic surgery; and although society continues to mold new standards of patients, there will still be two categories: Reconstructive and Cosmetic.
Works Cited


