



IS PLASTIC SURGERY ONLY FOR THE VAIN?

BY STEVEN H. DAYAN, MD, FACS

Who is getting cosmetic plastic surgery? It sure seems like it is becoming more acceptable in this country. A 1998 National Clearinghouse of Plastic Surgery (NCPS) survey found that over one million people underwent cosmetic procedures in 1998, more than doubling the 1992 figures. Interestingly, this value probably greatly underestimates the true number, because the NCPS study did not survey all U.S. surgeons who are performing cosmetic surgery.

Of those surveyed, the most commonly performed cosmetic procedure was liposuction up 389% from 1992. According to a 1998 American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery (AAFPRS) survey, three quarters of patient undergoing cosmetic surgery were women. But don't count men out, the percentage of men undergoing cosmetic surgery is rapidly increasing, up 50% from 1992. For men seeking an improvement in facial features, most underwent rhinoplasty (nose job). Women on the other hand most commonly treated their faces to chemical peels and injection of filler agents (i.e. Collagen). It also seems that the breast implant scare is now

defunct, as breast augmentation is up 413% from 1992. And facelifts, another commonly sought out procedure, has increased 82% since 1992.

If cosmetic procedures are so rapidly on the rise could the same be said of our culture's vanity? Isn't it possible that what we sometimes call vanity is really just an attempt to improve our self-image? And if so does vanity always deserve a negative connotation? As Carly Simon so eloquently and simply declared to her man in her infamous song "your so vain you probably think this song is about you."

In certain South American countries cosmetic surgery is considered a badge of courage or a rite of passage. However in this country it has been beguiled for many years as only for the vain. But isn't vanity really an argument in relativity? Cosmetic vanity runs a spectrum. What one considers vain another may feel is a necessity or a normal portion of their dress. For example some may feel it is vain to wash with a perfume-enhanced



soap, shave underarm hair or wear make-up. Whereas others recognize no issue with undergoing an all day cosmetic surgery procedure to change the way they look. Some may say that plastic surgery is only for those who lack self worth or who have a bad opinion of themselves. Yet interestingly most who undergo such surgery are very confident in

themselves and often treat their bodies better than others.

Is plastic surgery only for the rich? Perhaps at one time but this is no longer the case as the cost of undergoing an office based cosmetic procedure is not much more expensive than a day at the local beauty shop. Managed care, recognizing this creeping affordability, is jumping on

the bandwagon. Many HMOs are flirting with offering cosmetic surgery to their participants in a capitulated fashion.

So perhaps our relative value of what is vain is changing. As cosmetic surgery becomes increasingly ubiquitous in our society, its branding as a form of vanity is lessening. Cosmetic surgery is by many people's standard an acceptable option to improve the way they feel. The important point is, if you are considering under going a cosmetic procedure you have thoroughly thought it out, you are comfortable with the idea and you are doing it for yourself. Be assured that you are not the only one interested in improving the way you feel.

If that is vanity, so be it. After all, when Carly Simon accuse her man of being vain for thinking the song is about him, isn't he correct?

Some protesters argue that if the higher power who created us wanted us to be more beautiful he would have given us wrinkle free skin, a perfect nasal profile or wide eyes with out the bags. However, it is worth mentioning that the creator also gave us a certain hair color, which is often altered by many of the same naysayers. Additionally, symmetrically pierced earlobe holes is not part of our given anatomy.



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