

Women's magazines downplay emotional health risks of cosmetic surgery: study

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While the emotional health implications of cosmetic surgery are still up for scientific debate, articles in women's magazines such as *The Oprah Magazine* and *Cosmopolitan* portray cosmetic surgery as a physically risky, but overall worthwhile option for enhancing physical appearance and emotional health, a UBC study has found.

The study, published in *Women's Health Issues* journal, is the first to examine how women's magazines portray cosmetic surgery to Canadians. It also finds that male opinions on female attractiveness are routinely used to justify cosmetic surgery and that a disproportionate amount of articles are devoted to breast implants and cosmetic surgery among women aged 19-34.

"Alongside beauty, clothing and diet advice, women's magazines present cosmetic surgery as a normal practice for enhancing or maintaining beauty, becoming more attractive to men and improving emotional health," says Andrea Polonijo, who conducted the research at UBC as an undergraduate honours thesis in the Dept. of Sociology.

Polonijo, now a graduate student at University of Toronto's Dalla Lana School of Public Health, examined how Canada's five most popular English-language women's magazines – *Chatelaine*, *Cosmopolitan*, *O: The Oprah Magazine*, *Flare* and *Prevention* – portray cosmetic surgery. The study focused on 35 articles published between 2002 and 2006.

"Magazines are communicating the physical risks of cosmetic surgery

more than the emotional health risks," says Polonijo, noting that studies have found that emotional health issues such as anxiety and depression may arise or increase in women who undergo physically successful cosmetic surgery, regardless of their preoperative emotional state. Of the articles that mention emotional health, only 18 per cent suggest cosmetic surgery may be detrimental to emotional well-being, the study found.

Magazines routinely present two "ideal" cosmetic surgery candidates, the study found: an unhappy, insecure, lonely woman looking to boost low self-confidence and self-esteem, and a successful, attractive, confident woman with high self-esteem who seeks cosmetic surgery to maintain perfection.

"These two profiles represent extremes of a wide range of attitudes, for which many women may view themselves as being somewhere in-between," says UBC sociology professor Richard Carpiano, a co-author of the study. "This potentially allows for cosmetic surgery to be presented as an option for many women regardless of their preoperative emotional state."

Men's opinions were often considered in these cosmetic surgery articles, with 29 per cent discussing the impact that women's cosmetic surgery has on the male population.

To see the Polonijo's and Carpiano's study, entitled "Representations of Cosmetic Surgery and Emotional Health in Women's Magazines in Canada," visit: www.sciencedirect.com/science/journal/10493867 .

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