

Cosmetic surgery affects job satisfaction

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

In the last few decades an increasing amount of money has been spent, mostly by women, on expensive cosmetic surgery procedures in an attempt to feel more attractive.

Despite the high cost and the fact that it can be invasive and permanently changes existing features of the body, [cosmetic surgery](#) is a worldwide phenomenon.

In Australia, cosmetic surgery has become a billion-dollar industry with estimates that between 4.2 per cent and 6.1 per cent of the adult population has undergone at least one procedure.

In 2015, more than 51,000 aesthetic plastic surgical procedures were carried out in the UK, a 13 per cent increase on the previous year. Last year, \$US8 billion was spent on such procedures in America.

While studies have shown that most people who undergo cosmetic surgery report higher [self-esteem](#) after surgery, no major investigation has been carried out into what happens when they return to work.

Given that work is a central part of many people's lives, we have investigated whether changes in self-esteem following cosmetic surgery extend beyond patients' perceptions of themselves into the broader realms of their feelings about their jobs. We focused on job satisfaction and burnout (or emotional exhaustion).

In 2013, we analysed responses from questionnaires given to 121 adult patients of two major private aesthetic plastic surgery clinics in Melbourne, who had undergone facial surgery between August 2008 and August 2012.

About 80 per cent of the patients were women aged between 19 and 68, and their average age was 42. Almost half had undergone nose surgery, a third had eyelid surgery, and a quarter had a facelift.

Our research findings, published in the *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources*, found that change in self-esteem following surgery was associated with how employees subsequently felt about their jobs. Indeed, most patients experienced an increase in self-esteem. Increase in self-esteem was associated with higher levels of job satisfaction and lower levels of burnout.

But a minority of patients found they had lower self-esteem after surgery. Lower self-esteem was associated with lower levels of [job satisfaction](#) and higher rates of burnout.

While beauty is culturally based, extensive research has demonstrated that people held to be attractive by others receive a "beauty premium" in terms of factors related to job success, such as income.

This is often explained as an "attractiveness bias" whereby the characteristics of beautiful people are overestimated by observers through a beauty-induced halo effect.

Our findings, however, showed that changed self-esteem following aesthetic surgery influenced how people felt about their work. It supports other research which shows that job success is partly a result of the fact that people who think they are beautiful have high self-esteem.



Facelifts are among the most popular cosmetic procedures. Credit: BestInPlastics/Wikimedia Commons

Self-esteem is related to many factors, including physical attractiveness. For many patients, though not all, cosmetic surgery provides advantages.

However, we can't ignore the fact that the overwhelming majority of

people who undergo surgical procedures to change their appearance are women. It seems likely that deep-seated socialisation processes continue to assert their influence on females in relation to the importance of physical attractiveness.

This situation can be explained, at least in part, by the different opportunities historically available to different genders in which beauty was an important factor for female advancement.

The workplace is an important area where such stereotypes can be effectively broken down.

If workplaces reward talent and effort, women and girls may come to rely less on the traditional emphasis on beauty as a basis for self-esteem.

Rewarding beauty (except in occupations where beauty is a productive commodity) is not good for companies. Self-esteem induced in employees by their feelings of being more attractive is also unlikely to lead to optimal performance within the company.

Job satisfaction motivates employees and burnout demotivates them. Only when productive employees are fairly rewarded can the best outcomes occur for organisations.

Employee self-esteem could be developed in ways most valuable and relevant to the organisation.

It is important for companies to establish and develop procedures to avoid poor decision-making in selection and promotion.

Supervisors should be trained in how to avoid any unconscious bias based on attractiveness. Unconscious bias is most likely to occur when candidates are interviewed. To avoid unconscious bias, criteria – with

associated questions – should be formulated well in advance of interviews.

These measures should have particularly strong effects for women. In most developed countries in the last half-century, there has been a dramatic rise in the educational success and qualifications of women.

In Victoria, using average ATAR scores for 2016, girls performed better than boys in high school examinations.

When these young women move into the workplace and see companies strictly imposing objective processes for selection, promotion and pay, then the perceived link between beauty and career satisfaction may be broken. If [physical attractiveness](#) is not rewarded, then women may come to rely less on beauty as part of their self-esteem.

More information: Alicia R Kalus et al. Cosmetic facial surgery: the influence of self-esteem on job satisfaction and burnout, *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources* (2017). [DOI: 10.1111/1744-7941.12137](https://doi.org/10.1111/1744-7941.12137)

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