

Social media and low self-compassion behind rise in cosmetic surgery, says study

September 25 2023



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When Kylie Jenner famously admitted that her signature pout was the result of lip fillers, there was a significant increase in interest and uptake of the cosmetic procedure. That's the power of social media.

But why is [social media](#) so persuasive and what is driving young women's attitudes to [cosmetic surgery](#)?

In a new University of South Australia [study](#) published in the *Journal of Technology in Behavioral Science*, researchers have explored just this, finding that young women who regularly engage with social media were excessively self-judgmental and more likely to consider cosmetic [surgery](#).

The study of 238 young Australian women (aged 18–29) also identified that 16% of women had already received cosmetic surgery and that more than half (54%) would consider having it in the future. Only 31% said that they would not undertake surgical cosmetic procedures.

Cosmetic surgery has become an increasingly popular way to change a person's appearance. From 2010 to 2018, cosmetic procedures and surgeries almost doubled from 117,000 to more than 225,000. Today, almost seven million Australians (38% of the [adult population](#)) are considering cosmetic surgery in the next 10 years.

UniSA researcher and Ph.D. candidate, Lauren Conboy, says the study highlights the profound and concerning impacts of [social networking sites](#) on young women's body perceptions and attitudes to cosmetic surgery.

"The prevalence of body dissatisfaction among young women has long been a pervasive issue, with social media promoting unattainable beauty standards," Conboy says.

"In Australia, [young adults](#) are among the greatest users of social networking sites, so their exposure to unrealistic body ideals is high. Not surprisingly, the increase in social media use has been accompanied by an increase in young women having cosmetic surgery.

"In this study we investigated how [self-compassion](#) might alter this relationship so that we can understand what we can do to influence positive psychosocial well-being.

"Self-compassion is about accepting flaws with neutrality. When we have positive self-compassion, we are kinder and more understanding towards ourselves; but when we have negative self-compassion we tend to overestimate and criticize our flaws.

"Our study found that cosmetic procedures were well accepted among young women, and that a higher use of social media correlated with a higher acceptance of cosmetic surgery.

"Specifically, we found that young women who over-identify with personal attributes that they believe are not attractive, are more likely to feel bad about themselves and despite recognizing this, can't seem to break away from these negative thoughts. Over-identification was the most important predictor of positive attitudes towards cosmetic surgery."

Co-researcher, UniSA's Dr. John Mingoia, says more must be done to help young women from striving for unrealistic and potentially harmful body images as portrayed on social media.

"Social networking sites are clearly a pervasive mode of comparison and body dissatisfaction for young women; however, due to their extreme popularity, they present an opportune platform to disseminate messages that may counter potentially harmful appearance-related content," Dr. Mingoia says.

"Research tells us that even after women get a cosmetic procedure, less than 40% are satisfied with their bodies post-surgery.

"Clinicians need to test and confirm the psychosocial safety of young

women who are possibly influenced by my [media](#) representations of beauty, before they go 'under the knife.'

"If [young women](#) continue to access cosmetic surgery without addressing underlying self-compassion concerns, they may never feel content in their own body."

More information: Lauren Conboy et al, Social Networking Site Use, Self-Compassion, and Attitudes Towards Cosmetic Surgery in Young Australian Women, *Journal of Technology in Behavioral Science* (2023). [DOI: 10.1007/s41347-023-00334-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/s41347-023-00334-1)

Provided by University of South Australia

Citation: Social media and low self-compassion behind rise in cosmetic surgery, says study (2023, September 25) retrieved 11 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-09-social-media-self-compassion-cosmetic-surgery.html>

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