

## Build-a-Body: Is Plastic Surgery In?

Alayna Thomas

As an avid reality TV watcher, I can easily say that one of my favorite shows is “Botched.” The show follows two plastic surgeons, Dr. Terry Dubrow and Dr. Paul Nassif, as they try to correct plastic surgeries that have gone wrong. Some of the more popular episodes include one where a woman’s breast implants made it look like she had one breast and another where a patient admitted that she had pig skin sewn into her abdomen to support her breasts. When I watch “Botched,” I always have a ton of questions — for both patients and surgeons. What surgeon would approve of an eighth nose-job? What circumstances did this person face to even make them *consider* getting an eighth nose-job? Could it be due to the type of images we see online?

Social media definitely plays a role in setting trends for plastic surgeries, especially the extreme surgeries that are featured on shows like “Botched.” We have so many filters and photo-editing apps that can instantly slim us down or change how we look, and we are constantly bombarded with photos of social media influencers that seem to have the perfect bodies and faces. In reality, women have been striving to fit beauty standards for a long time. The problem is that these standards change over time, and women can feel pressure to change their bodies to fit into the new standard. What we deem the “perfect” body in 2021 is not what was considered the “perfect” body in 2001. This also leads to changes in plastic surgery trends.

Nowadays, the Brazilian Butt Lift, or BBL, is a popular plastic surgery, according to The Aesthetic Guide. Before the BBL, breast implants were one of the more popular procedures to get. Mainstream beauty standards celebrated busty women, while viewing a large backside or being “slim thick” as undesirable. The movie “White Chicks” has perfect examples of the early ‘00s’ beauty standards. A memorable scene shows a white woman asking in a horrified tone if her ass looks fat. This little moment shows how different communities have different ideals, and how some ideals can cross over into the mainstream.

Plastic surgery often appropriates features that are common in communities of color. In the Black-American community, fuller, thicker lips and bigger butts have long been sought-after and often-seen features. Now that celebrities like the Kardashians have gotten lip fillers and BBLs, these characteristics have become mainstream. Another person who exemplifies this appropriation through surgery is Oli London. London, who is white, has gotten multiple plastic surgeries to resemble the K-pop star Jimin from BTS. In response, East Asian people have talked about how their features have been ridiculed historically, and how contradictory it is that someone (and their followers) now considers it “cool” to have surgery to possess said traits.

Looking beyond the appropriation, viewing individual body parts as “trends” is dangerous. Plastic surgery can be a permanent or semi-permanent change to the body. This is not like buying a bunch of trendy clothing items just to see the trend end a few months after you purchase them. If you want to get rid of the clothes, it is easy to do so. It is not easy to reverse a plastic surgery.

In addition, the recovery process is not pretty. Social media influencers and celebrities usually do not show their recovery process, which can cause people to have unrealistic expectations for plastic surgery. Depending on the procedure, many patients experience bruising, bleeding, restricted motion, and side effects from medication, often for weeks or even

months after their procedure. Someone who is seriously considering plastic surgery needs to look into the complications that the procedure could entail.

Recently, I got plastic surgery myself. Since high school, I had been looking into getting a breast reduction. I had done hours upon hours of research on the surgery and looked into the best surgeons in my city for that procedure. I researched how the surgery was performed, what to expect the day of surgery, and how the recovery process went. I even looked into the different incisions the surgeon could make. I had struggled a lot with my self-esteem due to the way my body looked and I believed that getting a breast reduction could help me with that. I wanted to get it in the summer of 2020, but hospitals were not allowing elective surgeries due to the pandemic. So, when my city allowed elective surgeries this past spring, I was ecstatic. I made an appointment with a surgeon as quickly as I could.

During the first consultation with my surgeon and nurse practitioner, I was asked a lot of questions about my mental health. They asked if I struggled with eating disorders, depression, or body dysmorphia. They also underscored the importance of having a realistic mindset. I was told that even though a breast reduction could help with my self-perception, I would still have to work on boosting my self-esteem. I am honestly so grateful that my doctor was up-front with me and made sure that I was a good candidate for the surgery. And I can truly say that the surgery positively changed my life. I feel much more confident and I wear clothes that my high school self never thought I could wear because they would never fit me right.

I will be the first to tell you that plastic surgery is not necessarily a bad thing. If you are interested in having a procedure done, do your research diligently, take the time to assess why you really want the surgery, and consult with a qualified surgeon. However, when you only get plastic surgery to follow trends or consult with surgeons that prey on patients, the result may not be as good. You want to get yourself a Terry DuBrow or a Paul Nassif — not one of the surgeons whose work they correct.