



Esthetic plastic surgery: Experiences concerning corporal (re) constructions and implications for nursing

Cirurgia plástica estética: experiências sobre (re)construções corporais e implicações para enfermagem

Cirugía plástica estética: experiencias acerca de las (re)construcciones e implicaciones corporales para enfermería

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Objective: to identify reasons which lead healthy subjects to search, for the first time, surgical methods for corporal modifications. **Methods:** it is a descriptive, exploratory and qualitative study. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews which were recorded. The interviews were made with eight women and resulted into four analytic categories. **Results:** the reasons which took healthy subjects to face surgical risks are regarding the improvement of the satisfaction with their own corporal image aiming at reaching a higher social insertion. It was observed that dissatisfaction concerning physical appearance was generated by inherited characteristics or by marks left after pregnancy. Financial cost, fear and family support, can make the decision to undergo the surgery difficult. **Conclusion:** the plastic surgery can promote the regain of self-esteem in the subject who makes the surgery.

Descriptors: Body Image; Beauty Culture; Surgery, Plastic; Nursing.

Objetivo: identificar motivos que levam indivíduos sadios a buscar, pela primeira vez, métodos cirúrgicos para modificação corporal. **Métodos:** estudo descritivo e exploratório de cunho qualitativo. Os dados foram coletados através de entrevistas semiestruturadas, que foram gravadas. As entrevistas foram realizadas com oito mulheres e resultaram em quatro categorias analíticas. **Resultados:** os motivos que levam indivíduos saudáveis a enfrentar riscos cirúrgicos dizem respeito a melhorar a satisfação com a própria imagem corporal almejando melhor inserção social. Constatou-se que insatisfações em relação à aparência física foram geradas por características herdadas ou por marcas deixadas após a gravidez. Custo financeiro, medo e apoio familiar, podem dificultar a decisão de realizar cirurgia. **Conclusão:** a cirurgia plástica pode promover a reconquista da autoestima no indivíduo que a realiza.

Descritores: Imagem Corporal; Indústria da Beleza; Cirurgia Plástica; Enfermagem.

Objetivo: identificar motivos para individuos sanos buscar, por primera vez, métodos quirúrgicos para modificación del cuerpo. **Métodos:** estudio descriptivo, exploratorio, cualitativo. Datos recolectados a través de entrevistas semiestructuradas, que fueron registrados. Entrevistas realizadas con ocho mujeres, resultándose en cuatro categorías analíticas. **Resultados:** las razones por las que las personas sanas enfrenten riesgos quirúrgicos están relacionadas con la mejora de la satisfacción con la propia imagen corporal, con objetivo de mejor integración social. Se encontró que insatisfacciones con respecto a la apariencia física fueron generadas por características heredadas o marcas dejadas después del embarazo. Coste financiero, miedo y apoyo familiar pueden dificultar la decisión de realizar cirugía. **Conclusión:** la cirugía plástica puede promover la recuperación de la autoestima de la persona que lo realiza.

Descritores: Imagen Corporal; Industria de la Belleza; Cirugía Plástica; Enfermería.

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Introduction

The culture which guides social contexts has rules, concepts and standards to which the subjects should adhere and adjust to obtain social acceptance. One of those standards makes reference to corporal image. Currently in our society, the ideal of beauty, which is a representation of success, is an athletic and framed body⁽¹⁻²⁾. Searching acceptance in society, which places physical appearance on a pedestal leads many people to have a plastic surgery of esthetic character⁽³⁻⁴⁾. Considering that beauty is a factor which interferes in the judgment of society, it is observed that some natural marks, such as aging and genetic inheritance, lead to an undesired corporal image which results in dissatisfaction and negative feelings. It is understood that this is a matter of health once the body ends up being seen as an enemy, taking the subject away from social life due to the shame of his own image. Among the first procedures searched for, as a way to improve physical appearance, are the cosmetic and clinical treatment, the physical exercises and the search for healthy eating habits^(1,3,5).

The practices used to improve corporal image differ among men and women. Men look for physical exercises which promotes the increase of the muscular mass associated, many times, to the use of anabolic and the diuretics while the women choose diets which are restrictive in calories, appetite inhibitors and the practice of physical exercises, which are many times excessive^(2,6).

With the technological advancement, new techniques immerge to correct or attenuate body corporal marks. The esthetic plastic surgery, when improving corporal aspects, can stimulate the subject to take his life back, but especially to accept himself. It should be considered that, beyond the improvements of surgical techniques, the cultural determinants mobilize the subjects to adequate themselves to a model of body socially understood as ideal⁽³⁻⁵⁾.

It is understood that nursing performs a fundamental role in the identification of the real

reasons which influence in the search for surgery, once many times the surgery is used as kind of escape from personal problems. The nurse should be apt to provide clear and real information regarding such procedure, with the purpose to mitigate the anxiety and fear of those patients, once, although esthetic plastic surgery has a different objective of other surgeries, it is actually an invasive surgical procedure, which also brings risks to the physical integrity⁽³⁻⁴⁾.

This study is aimed at identifying the reasons which led physically healthy subjects, with age between 40 and 60 years, to pursuit, for the first time, surgical methods as an instrument of modification of their bodies in order to improve it. As specific objectives it is proposed to identify which ways should be chosen for the election of the type of surgery as a possibility to improve their bodies; to report which difficulty and easiness are coped with in the hospital doing such procedure; to deepen the understanding on how those people feel concerning the results obtained with the esthetic plastic surgery made.

Method

The methodological orientation of this research had an exploratory descriptive character with qualitative approach⁽⁷⁾. The data collection was from March to May 2012 in the urban area of Santa Cruz do Sul, RS, Brazil, at a venue chosen by the interviewees.

At first, the search of the population of the research happened contacting two plastic surgeons which appointed possible subjects for this study. Among the patients, two fit in the criteria of inclusion established in the study. From then on, using the techniques of snow ball which allows the first participants to appoint new ones, and then successively, until the proposed objective is reached⁽⁸⁾. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, formed by a heading and eight open questions, which was recorded and later on transcript.

The selected women were those who coped with the following criteria of inclusion: age between

40 and 60 years; submitted to only one esthetic surgery for at least 6 to 12 months prior to date of the interview.

Data were analyzed through their content, which were divided into three phases⁽⁹⁾. Pre-analysis, characterized by exhaustive contact with the material collected, observing the objectives of the research; Exploration of the material to classify and to ordinate the content. The project was approved by the committee of ethics in research of the Universidade de Santa Cruz do Sul under protocol number 3041/11 respecting the ethical principles established by resolution 196/96.

Results

Of the eight interviewees, five are married, two are in a stable relationship and one is single. Concerning schooling, five have studied for eleven years, two have incomplete university degree and one has university degree. The age range was between 40 to 45, one between 46-50 and another between 51-57 years.

Of the interviewees four have one child, three have two children and one has no children. All of them live in the urban area.

Concerning the surgical procedures and the number of interviewees who underwent them the following results were found: mastopexy (4), miniabdominoplasty (2), abdominoplasty (3), liposuction (4), blepharoplasty (2), rhinoplasty (1). It is highlighted that some interviewees underwent to more than one procedure at the same time.

The data analyzed resulted into four blocks with the following themes: The origin of the corporal dissatisfaction; the factors which influence on the treatment decision for the esthetic plastic surgery; the type of esthetic plastic surgeries made; and the results and feelings provoked after the corporal change.

Discomfort and perspective of change

Among the women interviewed, a common characteristic was noticed, there is, the corporal dissatisfaction allied to the desire of physical change. Such discomfort can be perceived in the following report: *I didn't want too big breasts, I didn't want to have this belly... because I wasn't feeling well with myself, right? I wasn't feeling well...* (Bela).

Besides the discomfort felt by these women, the association of the exploration of the media for the ideal body can affect the mental health; a fact which can be noticed in the report as follows: *I felt quite bad, I got a little depressed, it was not what I wanted to see in the mirror* (Branca de Neve).

The dissatisfaction with the physical appearance can make the subject psychologically misfit, arousing doubts on their social acceptance and their capacity to be loved. Being uncomfortable with the appearance can also imply in reducing their social activities according to what was reported as follows: *... bars and parties, I have stopped going...* (Jasmine).

In the attempt to keep socially accepted, it is noticed that those people started to search for low-cost means to improve their physical appearance and keep them in the social group. Some interviewees also used risky methods, such as excessive physical activities and fast: *I also used to practice jumping, step and I almost died jumping and nothing helped...* (Cinderela). *I did try. I started a diet many times... but exercising I didn't even think about it.* (Pequena Sereia).

Sometimes, besides the growing corporal dissatisfaction observed in the previous reports, it is necessary that some extraordinarily unpleasant facts happen, so that some people take the initiative to take care of their own corporal image. The unpleasant fact was mentioned as a deception with themselves: *I had already wanted, for a long time, to make the surgery but on the day the friend of my son who was in our house, I was wearing a dress, the*

little boy saw me past his hands on my belly and said: "aunt, when is the baby going to be born?" That made me feel so unease that I saw it was time to do something about it (Jasmine).

Factors which influence on treatment decision

Several are the factors which can influence the decision of undergoing an esthetic plastic surgery. Diets, exercises, medications and other treatments can delay in showing significant results. On the other hand, the esthetic plastic surgery is considered by our interviewees as a faster and more effective method, but having a high-cost. *I regret not having had it before, not having a solution, and not having saved something (Jasmine).*

It was noticed that the expenditures with treatments and/or post-operative are not added to the previous budget of the possible expenses in having an esthetic plastic surgery. Not knowing these expenditures generates unpleasant surprises and can negatively imply in the results of the esthetic surgical procedure: *... Today I consider that, if I had to undergo the surgery today, I would have to save more money in order to have a drainage, because it is really important, because it retains much liquid and the results take too long to appear (Branca de Neve).*

Another financial aspect to be considered is the need of a caregiver. However, these details are not always respected: *In the post-operative, I know that I needed more care than I thought it was necessary, then I asked for help from a friend of mine who was a health professional...(Cinderela).*

Just like the financial matter interferes on treatment decisions, opinions obtained from acquaintances or even by the means of communication, concerning these procedures, can affect the choice of the patient in undergoing the surgery or not, once these comments can generate some discomfort to patient: *We start to remember all those people we hear about, who died during the liposuction surgery... but we know that the media always overvalue the wrong things (Cinderela).*

Although the above statements show capacity of selection of information, we cannot affirm that the outside opinion have not interfered psychologically in their decision to undergo an invasive procedure: *I had*

to have general anesthesia, then you keep thinking you're going to die during the anesthetic procedure and it's going to hurt... (Cinderela).

The fear was referred to as a factor of highest obstacle in the taking of decision to undergo an esthetic plastic surgery: *I thought I was the bravest person in the world... but at the moment I lay down on the table and saw that light above me I almost died of fear... (Bela). I was afraid to feel pain when I got home after the surgery (Jasmine).*

If, on one hand, fear is a negative factor in taking the decision, on the other hand, the support of the family is essential, once it provides more confidence and security to the patient: *...I had a husband who said: go there and do it, if it is bothering you, do it, and then I did it (Bela).*

Types of esthetic plastic surgeries made

In our research among the mentioned reasons for corporal modification there were those used to mitigate genetically inherited characteristics. The dissatisfaction with the genetically inherited facial expression was mentioned, showing that several members of their families have the same esthetic problem: *My mom had it in her eyes... and then my sister... I think that suddenly this is a family thing. The eyelid drops with age (Bela Adormecida). This parrot nose has followed me of my life... it's in the family (Jasmine).*

Among the reasons which led to discontent of these women with their own bodies, pregnancy and its consequences were predominantly mentioned. *In my pregnancy the belly became really flabby, the navel very withered (Bela). After I had my daughter my breasts became too flabby due to breastfeeding (Tiana).*

Another aspect which alters the female body after pregnancy is the fat and extra abdominal skin. Five of our interviewees reported to have undergone abdominal plastic surgery once the extra skin and the fat bothered a lot after pregnancy. *My abdomen was quite flabby, I had no way to correct this without plastic surgery (Rapunzel). It's sad when you have wore size 36 and after the children start wearing size 44 (Pequena Sereia).*

Undergoing more than one surgical procedure

at the same time is among the options of our interviewees. Cinderela chose the association of liposuction of flanks and abdominoplasty, to provide a better outlining of the curves: *I waited longer so that when I made it I could do everything I wanted, because I didn't want to have a narrow waist and keep on with wide hips, isn't it?* (Cinderela).

Results and feelings provoked after corporal change

Concerning the pre-operative period, the feeling described is generally a mix of anxiety, caused by fear and shame, and joy for being so close to the modeled body. *I was more anxious, right? I felt a little ashamed. I was there with my body exposed* (Branca de Neve). *When I arrived it was just that anxiety... in the waiting room I was even rather undecided* (Bela Adormecida). *A lot of nervousness, but there was also joy because I was close to conquer what I had always wanted* (Cinderela).

In the immediate post-operative period, a feeling of regret immerses, once edemas, bruises and scars are visible, concealing the desired result. *Soon I thought wow what have I done? I had many bruises* (Cinderela).

However after some months the symptoms disappeared and the new body, long waited for, could be seen and admired. *I am feeling much better, our self-esteem increases. The clothes that in the past made me feel bad, today I wear easily* (Tiana). *My self-esteem improved a lot... I see myself in the mirror and I like what I see. I put on some clothes, a blouse, and I feel well in that blouse* (Branca de Neve). *I am more confident, I no longer think that men are looking at me because of my horrible nose* (Jasmine).

The increase of self-esteem can also result in the rescue of an old relationship. *My husband and I are much better, I stopped telling him that I didn't want him to look at me without clothes. Even our marriage improved* (Pequena Sereia).

Discussion

The body has become an object of appreciation and social meaning. Understanding the ideal of beauty of each society implies in understanding the means in which the subject is inserted, once the judgment of

the definition of beauty is according to each culture. Described by philosophers in the past century as display and desecrator of sin, the body is currently seen as a kind of personal card of each one of us⁽³⁻⁵⁾.

The ideal of corporal beauty associated to success is ostensibly quoted by the means of communication and results in the increase of the search for an athletic body and delineated forms, so stimulated by the media. In the category "Body dissatisfaction: origin and change" it was detected that our interviewees felt disappointed with themselves and for that reason they deprive themselves of a social life fearing to look ugly and ridiculous^(1,2,4,10). Researches made with adolescents show that not having a good appearance can imply in being excluded of the social group in which the live.

The discontent with the physical aspect is a progressive feeling which interferes in the health of the subject, once that being healthy is equals to living well and happily. The data produced in the research showed that the interviewees felt inadequate concerning their physical appearance, which provokes them psychological discomfort. It is common for the people to look for means to improve or preserve their appearance in order to harmonize their mental health. A way reported to mitigate the psychological discomfort was to adhere to healthy eating, to physical exercises and also to drugs and therapy to soften undesired physical marks. It is important to highlight that in the search for an ideal standard of beauty, their own health can be set aside in the pursuit of a greater objective.

The esthetic plastic surgery has been widely incentivized by the contemporary society and pursued by the population, because it is an easy and fast means to reach an aimed result. In the category "Factors which influence decision taking" it was detected that, although it is an invasive means and has vital risks, the esthetic plastic surgery is an alternative for those people who need to increase self acceptance and the will to live⁽³⁻⁴⁾.

Another obstacle mentioned to fulfill the desire

to alter physical appearance with a surgery was the financial aspect. The interviewees mentioned that the planning of an esthetic plastic surgery is fundamental to avoid setback in the period of hospitalization or immediately after it once these esthetic surgical procedures are made in an exclusively private character. There may be, for example, the need of clinical esthetic assistance, such as lymphatic drainage after liposuction which highlights the importance of financial planning⁽¹¹⁻¹⁴⁾.

The expenditures involved in the whole process of corporal change must be accounted for, not only in the operative period, but also concerning clinical assistance after the surgery which includes the period away from work and, if needed, hiring people to provide home assistance.

Another aspect which influenced the interviewees to undergo this surgery is regarding the opinion of other people who have already undergone some kind of esthetic surgical surgery. Literature shows that the search for outside opinion must be careful, once the most common reports are those procedures which have had some kind of negative intercurrent. It was observed that the fear acted as a factor of reflection and pondering facing the decision of undergoing a surgical procedure. The fear to undergo a painful and invasive procedure or that some irreversible or even fatal intercurrent occurred was constant in the collected reports. Besides this, there was the fear that the result would not be satisfactory^(4,10,15).

So, it is understood that it is essential for these patients to be oriented by trained professionals, demystifying what people usually say which may interfere in the confidence regarding both the procedure as well as the institution and the health professionals that will assist them. When establishing a relationship of confidence since the pre-operative period, there will be a greater capacity to stand some discomfort provoked by the surgery. The nurse has an important role in the pre-operative period, where the patients can present anxiety and high level of stress.

It is up to the nursing team to provide orientation, physical and emotional readiness, evaluation and to lead them to the surgical center in order to decrease surgical risk, to promote recovery and to avoid complication in the post-operative period, once these are generally associated to inadequate pre-operative preparation⁽¹⁵⁻¹⁷⁾.

It is highlighted that contacts between the health professionals and the patient must be made in order to clarify all the patients' doubts, praising the existence of pros and cons, once many patients tend not to consider the possibilities of complications^(3,4,11,16). In the cases there is psychological affliction, where excessive valuing of corporal image is evident, the results of the surgical procedure may not please, once the necessary treatment for these cases is primarily emotional^(6,10).

The importance for the nursing team to identify these feelings is to avoid the exposition of the patients to unnecessary risks, once the concern with the physical appearance may not be the main factor of dissatisfaction of the subject⁽³⁻⁴⁾. For that, it is indispensable that the complete assistance to the patient goes beyond the operative period.

The support of the family was reported to our interviewees as having fundamental importance in the decision to undergo plastic surgery. The brief time away from the family members can be considered as delicate and make the patients prone to feel fear⁽⁵⁾. This is a crucial moment for the nursing professionals to exercise their skill: taking care. This care aims at clearing the doubts immersed and providing attention, in order to have their fear vanished. These attitudes allow the patients to feel more restful and secure regarding the esthetic plastic surgery, which confirms the need of directing the time of nursing professional concerning a surgical patient, especially the one who undergoes an elective surgery which is the case of esthetic surgical procedures^(4,16).

It is important to highlight that the search for esthetic surgery was never so big as nowadays. The wish to change and to rejuvenate was an outstanding

factor for the interviewees which overtakes the barrier of fear of the surgical procedure. The risks exist and there is a possibility of infection, hemorrhage and scars, among other factors mitigated by our interviewees facing the desire to become a beautiful^(3-4,11).

The esthetic surgery is an artificial means of beautifying appearance from the improvement of the primitive form, whose aspects are not liable to be changed through care in eating or physical exercises. This surgical method helps not only in esthetic beauty but is also responsible for the improvement and self-esteem and quality of life. Despite the fact that these corporal characteristics do not represent diseases, they can show negative psychological alterations in the subject⁽³⁻⁴⁾.

In the category "Types of esthetic plastic surgeries undergone" the surgeries with the intent to mitigate genetic characteristics were two: rhinoplasty and blepharoplasty. The esthetic plastic surgery in the eyes, called blepharoplasty, that is, the plastic surgery of the lids is a procedure which is part of a set of surgeries of facial rejuvenation, which has the objective to praise, improve and rejuvenate the lost physiognomy without having the face appearance altered. On the other hand, rhinoplasty has the objective to establish harmony between the nose and the rest of the face⁽¹⁸⁻¹⁹⁾.

Another type of surgery looked for was abdominoplasty. The depreciation of the appearance resulting from bad abdominal aspect provoked by pregnancy and/or unbalanced eating motivated the interviewees to choose this kind of surgery. Liposuction, associated to miniabdominoplasty, provides a better definition of the waist⁽²⁰⁾. The surgery of corporal outlining is among the most frequent procedures in Brazil. The association of one or more procedure was mentioned by the interviewees to solve their immediate dissatisfaction.

Mastopexy was another kind of surgery mentioned. It is a procedure which is characterized

by the removal of the excessive skin, mitigation of the flabbiness and correction of the fall of the breast, occurred after pregnancy to some interviewees in this research⁽²⁰⁾.

The last category analyzed, called "Results and feelings provoked after corporal change" showed that, despite the fact that the expected effects were so radical, the final appearance should be better than the initial one and also provide improvement in the psychological patterns. Expected changes require patience and comprehension. Soon after the surgery some troubles are common such as edema, bruises, among others. Although esthetic surgery does not have the power to radically transform up to perfection, it provides a unique feeling of psychological welfare, able to make these patients undergone such surgical procedure see beyond the results actually obtained, through the enhancement of their self confidence, the motivator of the social relations^(3,4,21).

The satisfaction perceived in the statements of the interviewees allows us to understand that the satisfaction with the body can improve the self-esteem of the interviewed women. This change is according to what the literature says and is reflected in the way of dressing, how they communicate with their partners and in the wider care with themselves^(4,20).

Final considerations

The popularization of the esthetic plastic surgery as a way to have a fast corporal modification, effective and with several benefits enhanced the search for it. This research was made with subjects between 40 and 60 years of age who had undergone esthetic plastic surgery. The criterion of inclusion as being the first plastic surgery by the subject reduced the number of participants because part of the people in that age range had already undergone esthetic surgical procedure.

The results of this research allowed to observe that the search for good physical appearance is

culturally encouraged, once it provides a better acceptance in society. It was observed that among the factors which make the decision taking difficult are fear and the financial matters.

Another outstanding aspect was that the search for popular opinion is routine, however it can provoke more anxiety in the patient. The data in this research show that these opinions have, as routine, the demonstration of negative facts. Although many subjects referred to fear as an obstacle for the esthetic plastic surgery, the good relationship between the health professionals and the patient showed to be fundamental for the latter to acquire confidence in the team. There was a positive reference regarding the nursing team, both concerning the pre-operative care as well as the information that can be rendered to the family members during the post-operative phase. Another mentioned aspect was about the availability of the nursing team to help anytime and to render information clearly.

This study made possible to consider that the main types of esthetic plastic surgeries undergone were those whose intention was to repair the signs provoked by pregnancy. The satisfaction provided by the plastic surgery showed that it really interferes in the enhancement of the self-esteem of the interviewees.

The limitations in this study are concerning the fact that it was made in a delimited region in with specific purposes. Due to the large number of esthetic plastic surgeries made in Brazil, it becomes fundamentally important that other studies are made on this theme, more specifically about intercurrences and non-satisfactory results.

It is understood that this research contributed for the theme studied once it showed that the subjects, dissatisfied with themselves need support to regain their pride and if this includes plastic surgery, it should be supported, as long as it is made with security, that is, with a reliable health team and institution.

Colaborations

Voese CF contributed for the analysis and interpretation of the data and the writing of the article. Kleinpaul WV contributed for the writing of the article. Petry AR contributed for the relevant critical revision of the intellectual content and the final approval of the version to be published.

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