

Higher Rates of Body Dissatisfaction in Gay Men Leading to a Rise in Cosmetic Surgery

Waleed Rashid, BS*; Romina Deldar, MD†; Gabriel Del Corral, MD, FACS†

Modern society places a significant value on physical attractiveness. Multiple studies have found that men prioritize physical appearance in their mate more than women do.¹ Thus, with a goal of attracting men, both heterosexual women and gay men place a great emphasis on physical attractiveness. The literature also reports that gay men experience more negative body image evaluation and are more susceptible to body comparison than their heterosexual counterparts.² This may be associated with higher rates of subclinical eating disorders seen in gay and bisexual men compared to heterosexuals.³

Contemporary gay culture places great importance on attaining a body type that portrays masculinity and muscularity. An article published by *The Atlantic* states, “The idealized male physique is a major point of cultural reference in the dominant representation of gay men.”⁴ Dating apps and social media also may exacerbate body image issues in gay communities. Many may feel pressure to resemble the male fitness models they see in leading gay magazines or other online platforms. This has led many gay men to turn to plastic surgery or anabolic steroids to increase muscle mass.⁵

In 2020, the American Society of Plastic Surgeons reported a 29% increase in plastic surgery among men.⁶ This trend is being seen in other countries as well. According to the British Association of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons, there was an 18% rise in abdominoplasties performed on men in 2018.⁵ Gay men are thought to be one of the fastest-growing client bases in the cosmetic surgery industry; however, precise data are difficult to obtain because surgeons rarely question patients about their sexual orientation. LGBTQ+ friendly plastic surgeons report the most common procedures they perform are liposuction, laser hair removal, pectoralis or calf muscle implants, or Botox injections.³ In the past few years, the field of “anal rejuvenation” has emerged in larger cities, such as Los Angeles, New York City, or Chicago.⁷ These

noninvasive procedures consist of application of Botox, lasers, bleaching, tightening, or loosening of the anus. Aside from plastic surgeons, some colorectal surgeons report that their practice now consists of 20% anal rejuvenation services from the gay community.⁷

We cannot generalize the motivations behind every gay man’s pursuit of plastic surgery. However, it is clear that for many, the pressure to have the perfect body is a result of low self-esteem.⁵ To our knowledge, there are no published studies that report if undergoing cosmetic surgery actually improves body satisfaction among gay men. As the number of gay men seeking cosmetic surgery continues to rise, so too should our understanding and awareness of the influences that motivate them to alter their bodies.

Gabriel Del Corral, MD, FACS

Department of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery
MedStar Georgetown University Hospital
Washington, DC
E-mail: Gabriel.A.Delcorral@medstar.net

DISCLOSURE

The authors have no financial interest to declare in relation to the content of this article.

REFERENCES

- Li NP, Bailey JM, Kenrick DT, et al. The necessities and luxuries of mate preferences: testing the tradeoffs. *J Pers Soc Psychol*. 2002;82:947–955.
- Morrison MA, Morrison TG, Sager CL. Does body satisfaction differ between gay men and lesbian women and heterosexual men and women? A meta-analytic review. *Body Image*. 2004;1:127–138.
- Lang N. *Gay Men and the Tyranny of Body Image*. Outward. 2014. Available at: <https://slate.com/human-interest/2014/01/gay-men-and-plastic-surgery-why-so-much.html>. Accessed August 7, 2021.
- Ambrosino B. The tyranny of buffness. *The Atlantic*. 2013. Available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/sexes/archive/2013/08/the-tyranny-of-buffness/278698/>. Accessed August 8, 2021.
- Hunte B. The gay men risking their health for the perfect body. *BBC News* [online] 2020. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-51270317>. Accessed August 9, 2021.
- 2020 Plastic Surgery Statistics. American Society of Plastic Surgeons. 2021. Available at: <https://www.plasticsurgery.org/documents/News/Statistics/2020/cosmetic-procedures-men-2020.pdf>. Accessed August 7, 2021.
- Lighthouse: LGBTQ+ Affirming Care. Plastic surgery in the gay male community: does it makeover your esteem? 2021. Available at: <https://blog.lighthouse.lgbt/plastic-surgery-gay-male-community-self-esteem/>. Accessed August 11, 2021.

From the *George Washington University School of Medicine, Washington, D.C.; and †Department of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery, MedStar Georgetown University Hospital, Washington, D.C. Received for publication August 11, 2021; accepted August 28, 2021.

Copyright © 2021 The Authors. Published by Wolters Kluwer Health, Inc. on behalf of The American Society of Plastic Surgeons. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial-No Derivatives License 4.0 \(CCBY-NC-ND\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/), where it is permissible to download and share the work provided it is properly cited. The work cannot be changed in any way or used commercially without permission from the journal.

Plast Reconstr Surg Glob Open 2021;9:e3873; doi: 10.1097/GOX.0000000000003873; Published online 7 October 2021.