

Moultrie News

Section B

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Smile of the Week

"I'm smiling because I'm just happy to be at the Boys and Girls Club, helping to fix it up."
- James Robinson Jr.

Plastic Surgery: You must ask yourself - Is it right for you?



(Editor's Note: This is the fourth of a four-part series on plastic surgery east of the Cooper.)

By BRIGITTE SURETTE
SPECIAL TO THE MOULTRIE NEWS

When I began this series on plastic surgery, I had a few preconceived ideas about the subject, the surgeons and the women who chose to have it. As with most perceptions that we have before knowing all the facts, some of them were wrong. My interest in plastic surgery was twofold; I wanted to know what all the hype was about and being a 45-year old woman, the image that stares back at me each day reminds

me of paths not chosen, risks not taken and things I haven't accomplished that I thought 10 years ago I would have by this point in my life.

Aging is a natural part of living, but it doesn't always feel so natural. Youth is power. Youth is vitality, strength and robust health. Youth is endless opportunities. Then one day, we look at our reflection, and we see the face that we've lived with our entire lives and it's different. The irony of it is that a song or a smell can transport us back in a moment to an age where all things were still possible. We feel the exact way we felt when we were 18, 20 or 25. But our reflections tell us that we're not the same. That period has gone; that chapter has closed.

I once thought that people who chose plastic surgery were vain or narcissistic. After interviewing five women who decided to improve their appearance for their own sake, my opinion has changed. It's not that I'm for or against plastic surgery; it's that my perception about it has changed. I understand now why people choose to turn back the hands of time in this respect.

Aging is difficult for all of us because there is a point when we begin to realize our own mortality. Our physical appearance is an outward reminder of that. Kurt Vonnegut said, "We never realize the power of our youth until it's gone." We look at pictures of ourselves from 20 years ago and wonder why we spent so much energy worrying about how we looked. We were beautiful. We were young.

For two months, I've researched plastic surgery. I spoke to competent surgeons who do the work they do because it is their gift to do so. I talked to strong, lovely women who were willing to share their story with me so that other women can better understand why they chose plastic surgery. There was no shame in their decision. They were proud of their decision and maybe, if others were more like them, plastic surgery wouldn't have the stigma of trying to hang on to one's lost youth. I don't believe that's what these women were doing. They weren't celebrities trying to impress others or give the impression that they were younger than they were. They were reclaiming themselves, both personally and professionally. Part of that reclamation for them was their physical appearance, and as one woman put it, "Part of how I look is a big part of who I am." Isn't that true for all of us?

In our culture, youth and beauty are everything, especially for women. It gets you noticed and when you're noticed, you're listened to. A woman 40 and beyond has so much wisdom to share. She's active and a strong presence in the workforce. Perhaps that's why women are the predominate majority for plastic surgery. We want to be listened to. We deserve to be listened to. Maybe modern medicine has given us that chance again.

Are you a good candidate for plastic surgery?

Before committing to plastic surgery, there are questions you need to ask yourself:

Who am I doing this for? If the answer is anyone other than yourself, it's not for you. Plastic surgery will not make someone love you. It will not get you a better career. It will not create a brand new life for you after you've gone through a divorce, lost a job or suffered any kind of loss. These losses are part of the fabric of life, and a new face and body will not solve them or erase them.

What are my expectations after surgery? Are they realistic? Is the imperfection you want to improve really an imperfection? As one woman I interviewed stated, "I never was a beauty queen, so I didn't expect to look like one after surgery." That is realistic. God didn't make our faces or bodies perfect; a surgeon can't do it either.

Am I in good health to undergo surgery? Before surgery, you should be near your optimal weight. One surgeon interviewed stated that a person should be within 20 percent of his or her ideal body weight. If you're a smoker, quit before surgery. Maybe you'll stick with it (not smoking) after surgery. If you're diabetic, you're not an ideal candidate for surgery. A competent surgeon will advise you

of your individual risks.

Have I exhausted all other non-surgical possibilities such as diet and exercise to enhance or improve my appearance? Lifestyle behaviors such as leading a sedentary lifestyle, overeating, smoking and drinking too much alcohol all contribute to aging. Can you change some of those habits and adapt to a regular exercise program and cut down on risk factors to improve your appearance? If so, try it before deciding on elective surgery. Diet and exercise won't drastically change gender or hereditary specific problems, but it will improve them somewhat. One of the surgeons interviewed stated that if you can improve your appearance through making positive lifestyle changes and be satisfied with your appearance, it's a much better choice than surgery.

Do I have family and friends that will support me before, during, and after surgery?

You're going to be sore, swollen and bruised after surgery. You'll go through a period after surgery that may be daunting, at the very least. As one patient stated, "I made the mistake of looking in the mirror the day after surgery. I looked awful. It was scary!" Make sure that you have family and/or friends that can support you not just physically, but emotionally as well.

Do I feel good about me now?

Plastic surgery is a way to improve your appearance. All of the women I interviewed had happy, productive lives before their surgery. They did not choose surgery on a whim

or to fix something missing in their lives. For them, plastic surgery only confirmed what they already knew: they were beautiful, strong women. As one woman stated, "I wanted to look outside how I felt inside."

Choosing a surgeon

Once you've made the decision to undergo plastic surgery for the right reasons, a crucial part of that decision is choosing the right surgeon for you. Your surgeon is the person that will be the "artist" for your surgery. Your surgery will be as good as the surgeon who does it. Do your research. Ask friends and medical professionals for advice and recommendations. Make sure that they are board certified. Anyone with a medical license can perform plastic surgery, so make sure that your surgeon of choice has his or her certification. According to an online Web site (www.aboardcertifiedplasticsurgeonresource.com), your surgeon should have the following criteria, education and experience:

1. Graduation from an accredited medical school.
2. Completion of at least five (5) years of additional residency.
3. Usually three (3) years of general surgery and two (2) years of plastic surgery.
4. Actively practice plastic surgery for two (2) years.
5. Pass comprehensive written and oral examinations.

Ask your surgeon for before-and-after pictures of past procedures he or she has done. Ask if you can talk to patients who have had plastic surgery

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On Vacation With The Moultrie News



Larry Colley and his son Adam of Mount Pleasant enjoy the Moultrie News while hunting pheasants in North Dakota.



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