

# The ethical issues behind cosmetic surgery

[Health & Medicine](#)



The article I chose is entitled "Ethnic Differences Emerge in Plastic Surgery" and was written by Sam Dolnick for the New York Times on February 19, 2011. It explains that cosmetic plastic surgery is no longer an opportunity limited to wealthy suburbanites. In New York City, there has been a surge of immigrants having plastic surgeries that are correlated with their ethnic beauty standards.

Furthermore, doctors practicing in various ethnic enclaves throughout the city have seen; Italians having their knees reshaped, Egyptians getting face-lifts, Iranians getting nose jobs, Dominican women getting their buttocks' lifted, Asians having "double eye-lid surgery" or receiving a crease in their eyelids to make their eyes appear rounder, and Russians getting breast implants.

The article goes on to contrast the cultural beauty standards or tastes between one group of wealthy Long Island suburbanites with Washington Heights' ancestrally Dominican citizens, where, in Long Island suburbs they want fat removed from their behinds, and in Washington Heights they want their rear ends enlarged and rounded. There are three ethical issues present in this article, the first being the usage of surgery to improve patients' psychological self-esteem issues versus the usage of surgery for traditional health reasons.

The second issue is the fact that doctors are willing to offer layaway plans to help patients afford operations, but even more precarious, unlicensed practitioners are performing illegal surgery throughout most ethnic enclaves. The third is the belief that American pop culture and media have a role in affecting people's personal awareness and ideals of beauty, and this is <https://assignbuster.com/the-ethical-issues-behind-cosmetic-surgery/>

making them much more willing to have unnecessary cosmetic plastic surgery performed. John Stuart Mill's Utilitarian doctrine is the first ethical theory I chose to apply to these ethical problems.

Mill argued that morality is based on the consequences you take, and that consequences must be a means to increase utility or pleasure (Utilitarianism: Of What Sort of Proof the, para 3, 9). To the first ethical issue, Mill would most likely say that people who undergo cosmetic plastic surgery are moral because they are acting accordance with increasing happiness. However, they are acting upon a lower pleasure, which is vanity, and although this may bring some joy, it is something that can become an endless pursuit.

Towards the second issue, Mill would most likely say that the legality of the operations, and how the surgery is paid for, is superfluous to morality. If there is a tendency for patients to come out feeling and looking better, than the surgeon has done his or her job and there is nothing immoral going on. However, if there is a tendency for people to leave these places, where layaway is acceptable and the surgeons do not have licenses to practice, in pain and vexation, there is something immoral about this particular situation.

One could further argue, that performing surgery illegally and allowing layaway for surgery is based in greed. To this I believe Mill would still say that it is the patients responses that matter, for they are the ones who choose to have the surgery illegally, and if they have gained more pleasure through the experience, the actions taken by the illegal surgeons or greedy doctors was moral (Utilitarianism: Of What Sort of Proof, para 6).

To the last part, is media and pop culture responsible for unnecessary surgery, and people unhealthy personal beauty obsessions, he would say, generally no. Although he might say that certain parts of media are potent at changing the way people view their bodies and other people's bodies, and may make people obsessively drawn into the lower pleasures of cosmetic bodily improvement. Immanuel Kant's Deontological ethics is the second theory I chose to administer to the article. Kant argues that for an action to have genuine moral worth, it must be done out of duty, or from pure intentions.

People or semi-rational beings must not allow subjective experiences and past events, or particular circumstances, determine what actions are morally right, but must act to achieve the categorical imperative, thus making every intention and every action together an end in itself (Groundwork: Moving from popular, para 2-4, 6-7). To the first, again being the usage of surgery for traditional reasons, versus the usage of surgery for patients who have psychological self-esteem issues; they believe that having cosmetic surgery will result in looking better and therefore bring happiness.

Kant would strongly see this as immoral, as it is first off not being used to preserve one's life, and it is seeking out happiness through picking means which Kant believes will only lead to pain (Groundwork: Moving from popular moral, para 15-16). Also cosmetic plastic surgery is not universalizable because it means that our self-love is based off of subjective contingent circumstances, and not based off of self-love because we are semi-rational beings.

To the second ethical theory being layaway plans and illegal surgery, Kant would probably see the layaway plans as bad in that if everyone had layaway, there would not be any true ownership, and everyone would be in debt to someone else. Illegal surgery is also not universalizable in that, if it were universalizable, there would be no legality, and the state laws for surgical practices would not exist. As to whether Kant would see people receiving cosmetic plastic surgery as victims of our hyper-idealized beauty popular culture and media, he would probably say yes, there is a problem.

Pop culture, the media, and social networks certainly do have an insidiously furtive part in how we behave, and what we believe is beautiful. To go out of your way to make yourself more beautiful because someone or something tells you to do so, especially if it is instilled upon you in a covert way, is not acting in accordance with freedom. It is dually leading you to use surgery as a mere means to happiness, and using you as a mere means to waste your money on advertised beauty/ diet products, more surgery, and more repetitive mindless television shows.

In terms of which ethical theory best resolves the ethical issues spurred by this article, I would have to say Kant's theory of good intentions is most critical and affirmative. All of these ethical issues I have raised have questionable intentions behind them. If I were to go with Mill, I certainly would be a lot more lenient with these issues. That is not necessarily a bad thing, since these people's actions are not necessarily questionable. Their actions are somewhat good, because whether you are the patient, the doctor, or the pop culture media (entertainment) you are aiming at or supposedly affecting happiness (in a Mill sense).

But their intentions are somewhat convoluted, and in my opinion, impure. I believe most of the doctors have greed as their intention, especially those who are willing to perform surgery illegally. Sure, the illegal surgeons may be acting in a proper way, that is, they may perform the surgery properly. But behind it all is an intention of surreptitiously avoiding the rules of the state to save money, meanwhile being completely liable to malpractice and putting in jeopardy their lives and the lives of their patients.

The patients may know that these doctors are quacks, but if they don't, then in fact they are being lied to and are being placed under the knives of surgeons who are dishonest and hence treating the patients as a mere means. Furthermore, I believe anyone who is getting cosmetic plastic surgery based off of established beauty standards, unless in some horrific accident or bearing some horrific deformity is impure in their reasoning.

They are giving into standards that are not their own, but have been environmentally, and artificially created, beefed up and branded. Thus, in a Kantian sense, people are acting not under a categorical imperative, but under empirical knowledge that has been conjured through culturally relative or subjective circumstances. In sum, Kant would say be happy with what you look like, and don't attempt to change it based off of your cultural preferences or media created beauty bombardments, because you are not acting freely and with duty.