

The Janus Face of Cosmetic Surgery: The social price of seeking beauty

Fabienne Krywuzcky

Toulouse School of Management/Toulouse School of Management

Kobe Millet

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Mirella Kleijnen

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Michail Kokkoris

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Jennifer Argo

University of Alberta

Cite as:

Krywuzcky Fabienne, Millet Kobe, Kleijnen Mirella, Kokkoris Michail, Argo Jennifer (2026), The Janus Face of Cosmetic Surgery: The social price of seeking beauty. *Proceedings of the European Marketing Academy*, 55th, (132399)

Paper from the 55th Annual EMAC Conference, Bath, United Kingdom, June 2-5, 2026



The Janus Face of Cosmetic Surgery: The social price of seeking beauty

Abstract

Cosmetic surgery is becoming increasingly popular, with consumers undergoing transformative procedures to enhance their appearance. While often pursued to improve social impressions, five pre-registered studies (N = 3,790) show it can backfire by increasing perceptions of narcissism—a dark personality trait characterized by an inflated sense of self-importance. We argue that these perceptions arise because cosmetic surgery conveys a willingness to endure sacrifices (e.g., health risks) for the sake of beauty, suggesting a strong desire for admiration. Accordingly, narcissism inferences decrease when the surgery serves another purpose than appearance enhancement, such as restoring appearance or improving health. Conversely, narcissism perceptions intensify when the procedure involves greater sacrifices, like higher health risks. Notably, anticipation of especially the rivalry component of narcissism increases likelihood of social rejection towards those undergoing cosmetic surgery.

Track: Consumer Behaviour