



## Centre for health Systems Research & Development

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### Reflecting on female beauty: cosmetic surgery and (dis)empowerment

#### CITATION

Heggenstaller AK, Rau A, Coetzee JK, Ryan A & Smit R. 2018. Reflecting on female beauty: cosmetic surgery and (dis)empowerment. *Qualitative Sociology Review*, 14(4): 48-65.

#### ABSTRACT

This project aims to unwrap some of the complexities related to female beauty and the body. It reflects on the second wave radical feminist view that beautifying the female body serves to attract male approval via the male gaze, both of which are deeply entrenched in patriarchal power. This perspective positions cosmetic surgery as a disempowering act for women. In riposte, we turn to third wave liberal feminist ideas to engage with the narratives of ten participants who tell of their personal experiences of, and motivations for, undergoing a cosmetic intervention. We undertake an in-depth exploration of these lifeworld experiences and the interplay of subjectivity and intersubjectivity in the women's encounters.

Findings suggest that a cosmetic intervention is often obtained for the self as opposed to satisfying the "other." Importantly, cosmetic interventions allow a process to occur in which an individual's physical body becomes better aligned to her sense of self. From this liberal feminist perspective, cosmetic surgery is positioned as an empowering act.

**Keywords:** Feminist Thinking; Cosmetic Surgery; Phenomenology; Lifeworld; Social Constructivist; Embodiment; Self-Empowerment; Femininity