

# NUFFIELD COUNCIL ON BIOETHICS

## Cosmetic procedures: ethical issues

### Online questionnaire: summary

June 2017

From 25 January 2016 to 18 March 2016, the Nuffield Council on Bioethics' Working Party on *cosmetic procedures: ethical issues* held an open consultation exercise to inform its work.<sup>1</sup>

The first part of the consultation exercise was presented in the form of a consultation document aimed at those working professionally in the field of cosmetic procedures, such as professional membership organisations, or practitioners. The second part of the consultation, however, focused on obtaining input from members of the public, including those with particular views on ethical issues around cosmetic procedures, or those who had themselves undergone a procedure. This part of the exercise was launched in the form of a questionnaire made available via the Survey Monkey website, and posed 15 questions to respondents in a tick-box or free text form.

The Working Party had received 448 responses to the online survey. Some respondents addressed each question in full, whereas others chose to only respond to one or two questions.

This document summarises responses to the online questionnaire, and draws together key themes which emerged as a result of the exercise. Each of the 15 questions is addressed in turn.

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on the Council's work on cosmetic procedures, see:  
<http://nuffieldbioethics.org/project/cosmetic-procedures/>.

## Attitudes to cosmetic procedures – for you

**Question 1: Have you ever had, or thought seriously about having, a cosmetic procedure?**

The Working Party aimed to assess whether / how respondents' attitudes to other questions raised in the survey were influenced by their response to this question. Therefore, where appropriate, the remainder of this summary document takes into account respondents' answer to this initial question when analysing their responses to proceeding questions.

Out of 448 respondents, 271 (60%) responded negatively to this question; 79 (18%) stated that they had undergone a cosmetic procedure; and 98 (22%) indicated that they had thought about having a cosmetic procedure.

**Question 2: Please say why you haven't had, or wouldn't consider having, a cosmetic procedure.**

*(NB: only visible to those who had responded negatively to Question 1)*

A range of responses were provided by individuals in reply to this question, including a number of key themes.

Responses can be divided broadly into those which focus on intrapersonal factors (which most respondents focused on) and those which highlight points associated with societal issues.

### **Intrapersonal factors**

#### ***Fears of having a procedure***

Several respondents indicated that their reason for not having, or considering, cosmetic procedures was due to fear of the process, although relatively few provided expansive comments on the root of those fears. Few free text responses were received, but included:

*"I'd be too nervous of altering my appearance permanently."*

*"I am terrified at the thought of any surgical procedure".*

#### **Risk**

Similarly, risk was highlighted by a number of responses, but expanded upon by relatively few in the available free text boxes. Comments received include:

*"Infection. Totally unnecessary risk to health and image if it went wrong."*

*"I feel the risks outweigh the possible benefits".*

#### **Abhorrence**

Respondents also indicated that they abhorred the performance of cosmetic procedures. Comments included:

*"I find it quite horrific that so many people are distressed by how they \*look\* and will seek surgery to "correct" their image."*

*"The idea of using surgery to alter my body creeps me out."*

The language employed by some respondents also suggests reactions of abhorrence in response to the question of undergoing cosmetic procedures:

*"[I am] uncomfortable with the idea of mutilating myself in the pursuit of physical attraction."*

*"I would be ashamed if people knew that I had a cosmetic procedure."*

A further respondent simply stated "gross" in a one-word answer to this question.

### ***Perception that cosmetic procedures are 'unnatural'***

The argument that cosmetic procedures are 'unnatural' appeared several times in respondents' answers to this question.

*"Unless caused by injury I would live with what nature had provided."*

*"It would be unnatural."*

*"I just try to accept naturally the way my body is and if there's something I want to change, I try to do it by other means, more exercise, healthier food, etc."*

*"I feel that it is pushing the boundaries and messing with nature."*

*"I don't believe I should have to change the way I look naturally."*

*"I prefer to grow old in my own natural skin."*

*"I don't believe in messing with nature."*

*"... I am not interested in changing my natural appearance."*

*"I want to look as natural as possible."*

*"It doesn't feel natural or right."*

Similar arguments around 'nature' are also indicated by some respondents who indicated that they had, or had considering having, a cosmetic procedure in response to Question 5 (see below).

### ***Financial factors***

The cost of using cosmetic procedures was an issue raised by a number of respondents. One respondent noted simply that he / she "can't afford it"; another observed that "it's expensive!"

However, other respondents took their views on financial factors to a slightly different argument: that to have a cosmetic procedure would be a 'waste of money'.

*"... it's more important to work on the acceptance of physical characteristics rather than spending money to change the way I look."*

*"I find spending money on something like this almost obscene, when the money could be spent on your welfare and the welfare of others."*

Another respondent noted financial considerations within a general comment on the cosmetic procedures sector.

*“... unwillingness to put money into an industry built on people’s unhappiness with their own imperfections.”*

### **Satisfaction with appearance**

Several respondents stated that they are happy with their appearance, and thus felt there was no need to use cosmetic procedures.

*“I am happy with my own appearance... Even though I may be a little overweight!! My husband describes me he knows no one happier in their own skin.”*

*“I am happy with the way I am, flaws and all.”*

*“I do not have (at least in my opinion!) any features that are so unusual / disfiguring that would make me contemplate a cosmetic procedure.”*

*“I’m happy with the way I look. Far from perfect, but it’ll do!”*

### **Vanity**

The view that using cosmetic procedures is a vain pursuit was held by several respondents.

*“I don’t feel I have any great need to have cosmetic surgery and so it would be entirely for vanity if I were to have it.”*

*“I am not vain enough.”*

*“... it’s vain by definition and would display, in me, an inappropriate attachment to appearance.”*

*“I would not subject myself to an unnecessary procedure purely for vanity reasons.”*

Closely associated with vanity is the notion that cosmetic procedures are ‘shallow’. One respondent, for example, notes that “elective cosmetic surgery is a shallow self-obsession”.

### **Aesthetic factors**

A number of respondents were unconvinced that cosmetic procedures could offer the opportunity to ‘look better’. These comments were particularly focused on procedures which focus on the face.

*“... I don’t want to look like a plastic, expressionless doll.”*

*“People, especially women, look unreal and weird with skating rink faces and big lips.”*

*“... I often think ageing celebrities have made themselves look worse, not better.”*

*“People end up looking freaky.”*

*“I don’t think the short-term improvement in looks is sustained and often look very odd when they get it.”*

*“I don’t want to pay a lot of money to ruin my face.”*

Other comments around aesthetic factors include:

*“I don’t think there is a standard of beauty that people should conform to which I think it implied by cosmetic surgery – beauty comes in many forms and they are not all pointy-nosed and chinned.”*

*“I don’t want to conform to a cultural and to some extent arbitrary standard of what beautiful is.”*

### **Preference for other methods of changing appearance**

A small number of respondents highlighted other ways of changing appearance rather than through cosmetic procedures.

*“[I would] look to exercise etc. to change things first.”*

*“there are much less invasive, expensive and complex ways of fixing it: exercise, good diet, etc.”*

### **Appearance as ‘unimportant’**

Several respondents suggested that appearance, and consequently using cosmetic procedures, was unimportant to them.

*“I’m too busy thinking about other things. My appearance doesn’t worry me enough to warrant the consideration of cosmetic surgery.”*

*“I... don’t set as much store by appearance as many people seem to.”*

*“One should not be judged on one’s looks. It is sexist and ageist.”*

*“I am relatively happy with the way I look and my sense of self-esteem is not based exclusively on my appearance.”*

Other respondents noted similarly that the aim of ‘looking beautiful’ is overrated, and may even be a negative attribute.

*“I have very little desire to be beautiful in an out of the ordinary way. I think it may have more problems than benefits to it.”*

*“... I would certainly be wary about treating my body as something separate from and additional to myself: a thing, an object, that needs to be reshaped, fixed to meet the aesthetic demands of the male gaze.”*

Other respondents took a broader approach, embedded in societal context:

*“I feel aware of societal pressures relating to particular ideals of beauty and it would be [un]realistic to deny that these do not have some effect on me. However, I do not want to succumb to these pressures by seeking a cosmetic procedure as this gives recognition to these ideals.”*

### **Slippery slope**

A small number of respondents suggested that they would not consider undergoing a cosmetic procedure because they may find themselves on a path to undergoing many more.

*“I worry that once I changed one thing I would want to change many others.”*

*“Where will it end? I will start to find faults with myself everywhere.”*

## **Societal concerns**

A small number of respondents highlighted wider societal concerns as reasons for their negative response to Question 1.

*"I think it's damaging... psychologically, physically, emotionally, socially. We live in a world where there are enough pressures on people to conform already."*

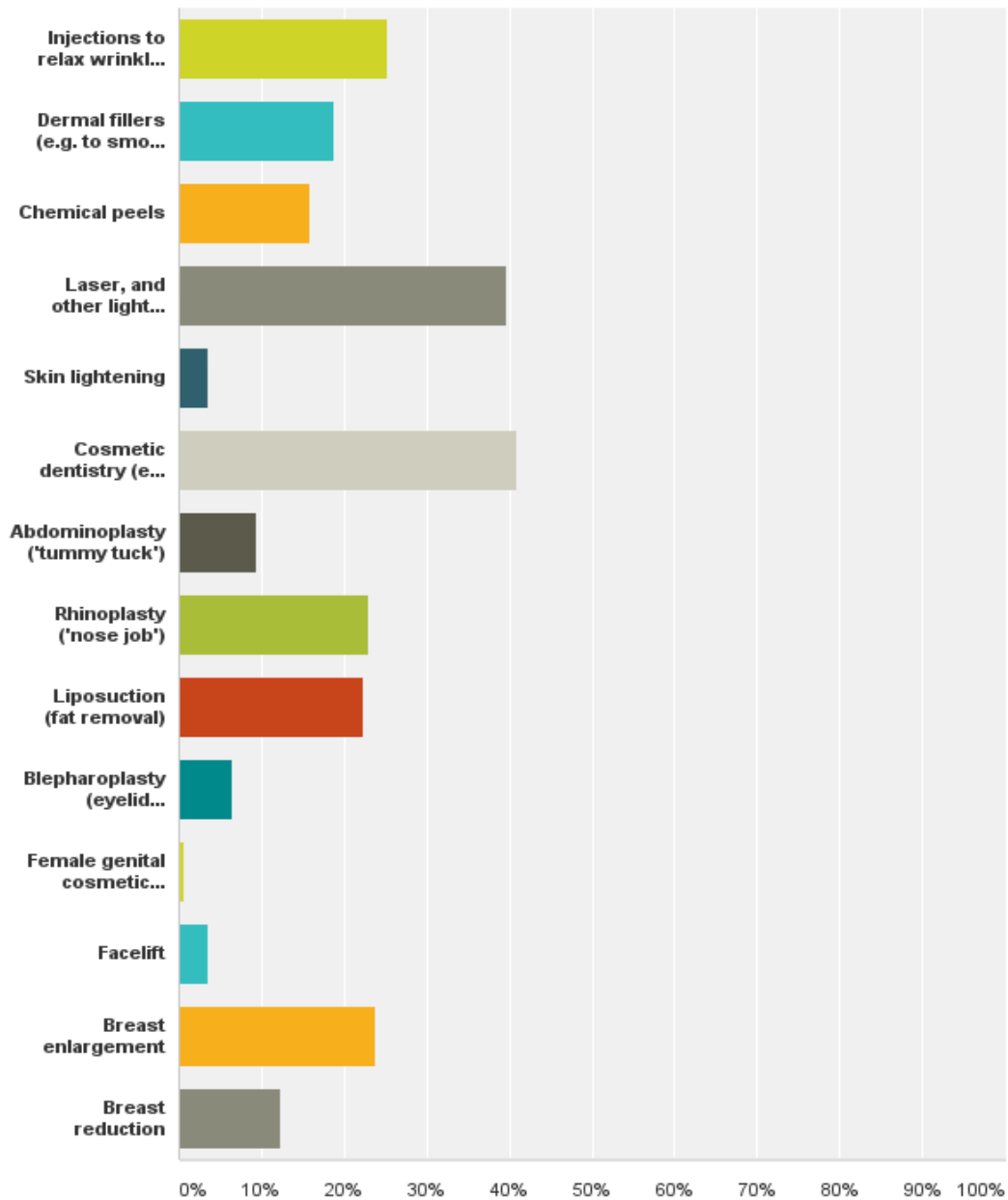
*"... I realise the damaging implications in the culture of plastic surgery (particularly in women."*

*"Find the thought rather disgusting; don't want to live in that sort of society."*

**Question 3** (NB: only visible to those who answered 'yes' to Question 1)

**Q3 Which procedure(s) have you had or thought seriously about having? What prompted you to have it, or to consider having it?**

Answered: 139 Skipped: 309



This table indicates that the most popular answers to this question are laser and other light treatments, and cosmetic dentistry. Fewest respondents indicated that they had considered female genital cosmetic surgery (FGCS). Respondents were able to indicate more than one procedure in the tick-box part of this question, and most



individuals who responded to this question chose to do so. In some cases, respondents explained their approach to each of the procedures they had:

*“I have only had a mole removed for cosmetic reasons. I have done laser hair removal at home but don’t know if that counts. I spent many years seriously considering breast enlargement but didn’t do it. I have thought about having my wonky jaw straightened but it’s a big job and I’m too scared. I am thinking about having another facial mole removed. I have considered dental whitening but just use whitening toothpaste instead.”*

*“Why do I do this? I want to look good. I value my appearance. It is a nice thing to look good. I feel good when I look good. My skin has been very damaged by living in a location of no ozone. I have tried every possible method to get rid of cellulite-- it will not go and has been there since I was 12. Why should I be forced to keep it? I never grew breasts-- very unfair. Should I be forced to live that way? NO.” [User of liposuction, breast enlargement, and facial needling]*

*“I had fillers due to loss of weight. Now I have to have it regularly and I feel and look younger than my age. I have thought about Botox, but worried it might be too much. I don’t want to look plastic. I always wanted a nose job, I had an accident and my nose is now bent since I was 13. I hate it and I never have pictures taken as it shows. I cannot afford to pay for it or I would do it.”*

Similarly, respondents who were considering future procedures also set out their reasons for doing so.

*“I would like to have when I get more into my mid / late 30s – I think if it is done well it can look natural and I like the idea that it can prevent the signs of ageing as I take a lot of pride in my skincare and looking after myself. Dermal fillers to enhance my lips is a ‘trend’ at the moment that I wouldn’t object to as again, can look very natural and it is not permanent. Cosmetic dentistry - had one small cap put on a tooth already and feel that although I’m satisfied with my smile, it could be improved.”*

*“I have lost about 50 to 60 kgs of weight and have a lot of loose skin and stubborn fat which I find not only ugly but annoying. I would like it all tightened up. I have H cup breasts, even after losing weight, which cause my back, shoulders and neck pain, hence would like them reduced. My teeth are quite brown, from childhood use of antibiotics, etc. and this I would like fixed from a vanity point of view. In my early 20s, I was on high doses of steroids for a medical condition and since then I have found I have lots of facial hair which distresses me. So, I have tried laser hair removal (not particularly successful)”.*

Further explanations of choices to have a single procedure were also offered by respondents in the free text box of this question.

*“I had a labiaplasty in my late teens because I thought my longer left labia was unsightly and it was painful in tight jeans. I hadn’t enough life experience to realise it was completely normal. I think drawings in biology textbooks and porn were the only times I had seen labia and mine did not look like the ones shown.” [User of labiaplasty]*

*“I have always had a flat chest and since I was young have felt self-conscious about that part of my body. I am also into bodybuilding and as I have built muscle I have considered breast enlargement to create a more symmetrical shape - to balance out broad shoulders and muscular legs. I*



*have since come to the conclusion that it is not worth the risk of surgery and I feel I am able to accept my body, even if I don't love it." [Considering breast enlargement]*

**Question 4: What prompted you to have a cosmetic procedure, or to consider having a cosmetic procedure?**

*(NB: only visible to those who answered 'yes' to Question 1)*

The complexity of the question of identifying motivations is highlighted by one respondent who had used cosmetic orthodontic procedures.

*"The exact reasoning is, unsurprisingly, difficult to properly identify [...] I have been unable to determine whether my motivations were purely instrumental (romantic prospects, increased confidence leading to improved professional success) or if I valued the potential change in a more intrinsic way."*

Other respondents provided a range of observations on this question, which can be split into several categories.

**General desire to improve appearance**

Some respondents indicated a general desire to change their appearance, although few offered substantive explanations of this desire.

*"I thought it might improve the appearance of my body following weight loss."*

*"I take pride in the way I look and enhancements by cosmetic procedures are a way of maintaining appearances."*

**'Doing it for myself'**

Other respondents suggested that their decision to use cosmetic procedures was to 'do it for themselves'.

*"I want to improve the way certain parts of my body look for my own satisfaction"*

*"My intentions were never based in outward responses - I've never felt inclined to undergo constricted surgery for others, it's rather always been an inward desire for self-satisfaction."*

*"Why do I do this? I want to look good. I value my appearance. It's a nice thing to look good. I feel good when I look good."*

**Others' influence**

The comments and criticisms from other people featured frequently in respondents' answers to this question.

For example, one respondent who had undergone eyelid surgery noted that his / her motivations to do so included that "people told me I look old / tired / sad". Other similar comments include:

*"... having mean comments from others, e.g., 'she looks like an ironing board' from men in the street." [Considering breast enlargement]*

*"[I] considered some procedures because of insults and abuse from other people about the specific feature (e.g. big nose)." [User of various facial procedures, and breast reduction]*

*"I was 38, but had large bags under my eyes... I'd always been pretty, but people started telling me how beautiful I was apart from my bags. A friend said to company, "she used to be really pretty" when she didn't think I could hear her." [User of a range of facial procedures, including having bags under eyes removed]*

*"I don't like the way I look and feel people judge me adversely for it." [Considering rhinoplasty]*

*"... dissatisfaction with body image, comments from boyfriends / sexual partners and comparisons I made between my appearance and my peers." [Considering liposuction and breast enlargement]*

Other respondents suggested that their decisions were affected by comparing themselves to others. One respondent who indicated that she had undergone a range of cosmetic procedures, including breast enlargement and rhinoplasty, stated that this decision was prompted by "unhappiness with how I look compared to others." Further, a respondent seriously considering several types of cosmetic procedure expressed "anxiety about being judged for looking unattractive and concern about satisfying my mate."

Closely associated with this category are concerns indicated by some respondents regarding their ability to find a partner. Comments include:

*"I am separated and in my forties, and I feel it might make a difference in the 'dating market' especially at my age."*

*"The end of my 15-year relationship with the father of my three children. I could not believe a future man would find my post-pregnancy / breastfeeding / weight-loss breasts attraction, because I didn't. As it turned out, it's mostly fine, I definitely have more of a problem with my breasts than any men I've encountered!"*

## **Seeking 'normality'**

Several respondents stated that they were prompted to use, or think about using, cosmetic procedures in order to obtain 'normality' in their appearance. For example, one female respondent considering breast augmentation stated: "I don't look 'normal' as my breasts are very small..." Similarly, another respondent also considering breast enlargement stated that was prompted by a desire "to look more normal."

Other comments on respondents' desire to be 'normal' include:

*"I used to think my nose was enormous, like HUGE - a potato just plonked onto my face [...] Now I'm older I can see my nose is fairly normal and fits with my face. It's not the beauty ideal, but it's nice enough in its way." [Considering rhinoplasty and cosmetic dentistry]*

*"Wanting to feel more womanly as I had no breast tissue. Deformity." [User of breast enlargement]*

*"Insecurity about my body as a teenager (I no longer feel this way - no longer want a procedure). I felt my breasts were much smaller than everyone else's."*

## Effects of pregnancy

A small number of respondents indicated that the effects of pregnancy on their bodies influenced their decision to use, or consider using, cosmetic procedures. For example, a respondent who indicated that she had considered using breast enlargement noted, “pre-children, I accepted my body and kept myself slim, but following three kids, my small breasts seem flatter as my tummy stuck out much more, and time to keep myself slim isn’t the priority anymore.” Similarly, a further respondent stated: “Had kids and my breasts had shrunk so much, so wanted an uplift.”

## Concerns around visible ageing

Some respondents stated that they were prompted to have, or consider having, cosmetic procedures due to an awareness of visible signs of ageing.

*“The appearance of ageing signs in my face.” [User of a wide range of facial procedures]*

*“Fears about becoming less attractive due to ageing. Aware of societal pressure on women to look young. Concerns that if I didn’t have Botox at this point I may be leaving it too late.” [User of injections to relax wrinkles]*

## Self-esteem and addressing unhappiness

Self-esteem was frequently cited as a motivating factor by respondents, but infrequently explained.

Some respondents referred broadly to “dissatisfaction with looks”, or that they “didn’t feel confident about my looks”. Other respondents, however, indicated an expectation that cosmetic procedures might improve their self-esteem: “to feel more confident”, and “to feel better about myself”.

A more expansive comment was noted by one respondent considering cosmetic dentistry, rhinoplasty, and breast enlargement.

*“I’ve never had cosmetic surgery, but I have wanted to since I was a teenager, due to feeling grotesque. I’m now 23.”*

General comments relating to unhappiness were also highlighted. For example, one respondent who had used dermal fillers and breast enlargement noted simply: “I was unhappy”. A further respondent who considered using a range of cosmetic procedures also indicated that he / she was “not happy with self.”

## Physical discomfort

Other respondents – for example those who had lost large amounts of weight – highlighted the physical discomfort which had led to their decision to use cosmetic procedures. One respondent states: “I lost 7 stone in weight and had a large amount of loose skin which was uncomfortable and limited my ability to be active as well as my body image.”

Other comments relating to physical discomfort include:

*“physical discomfort, difficulty in various aspects of daily life.” [User of breast reduction]*

*“my lip was causing me difficulties in eating and was rather disfigured in appearance.” [User of lower lip debulking]*

*“Back pain, bad posture and difficulty running - since the operation I’ve been able to run more and have done hour half-marathons. To be honest although it was on the list, I don’t see it as cosmetic”. [User of breast reduction]*

## **Other comments**

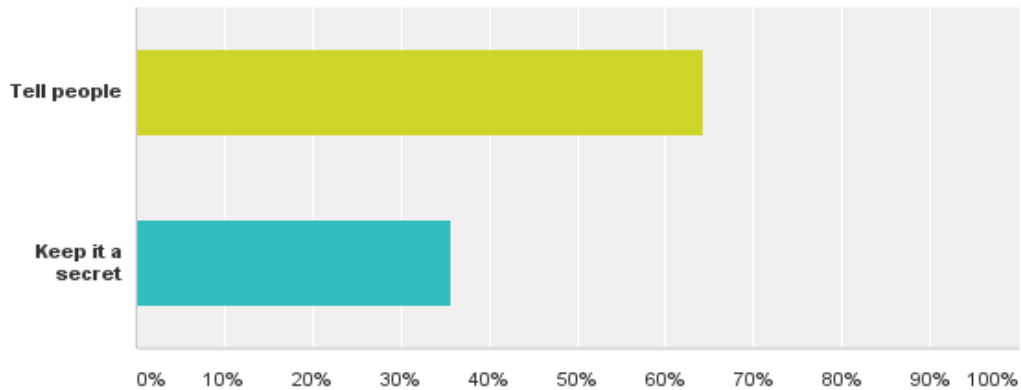
Some prompts were only noted by single respondents, including:

- Media influence: “to look like ideal image as portrayed by media / blogs / Instagram” [considering cosmetic dentistry and rhinoplasty]
- For fun: “There was a cheap offer on a voucher deal website for a lip filler treatment. The results are temporary and I consider it to be no different from (or just a small step up from) other methods women use to enhance their looks such as semi-permanent make-up, hair extensions, eyelash extensions etc. I’ve just always fancied larger lips and thought it would be something fun to do. I am however fully aware of where these ‘pressures’ come from.”
- For an event: “[I] thought my hooked nose looks awful in photos and have been considering getting it done before I get married.”
- Ease / convenience: notably, with hair removal: e.g. “[the] idea that I would not need a certain procedure such as waxing ever again in the future.”

**Question 5** (NB: only visible to those who answered 'yes' to Question 1)

**Q5 Would / did you tell people that you had had a cosmetic procedure, or keep it secret?**

Answered: 146 Skipped: 302



In response to this question, 64 per cent of respondents (n=94) indicated that they would tell others; 36 per cent (n=52) stated that they would keep it a secret.

In addition to indicating their preference through the tick-box section of this question, several respondents also used the free text box to explain their answer, providing a range of explanations.

**Respondents who indicated that they would / did tell others**

***The visibility of the procedure's results***

The visibility of the procedure's results was frequently cited as a reason for disclosing a decision to use a cosmetic procedure.

Some respondents who had undergone a procedure noted, pragmatically, that the difference between their appearance before and after the procedure was so markedly different that any attempt to keep their decision secret would be futile.

*"It was on my face – hard to hide!"*

*"It's clear. There's no hiding the fact that my teeth are much whiter than before."*

*"Told some people due to the obviousness of bandages post-surgery"  
[User of pinnaplasty]*

This reason was also offered by those who had considered using a procedure, but had not yet done so.

*"I would tell people. And I expect they would notice... Particularly if I went from an H cup to a D cup!!! I also think they would notice if I got my chin fixed and an apronectomy done. So, I would be honest."*

*“It would have been hard for a breast enlargement not to be noticed if I’d had one but I certainly wouldn’t have been shouting about it and tried to have kept it relatively private.”*

*“It would be so obvious that everyone would know anyway. I would just look silly if I tried to keep it a secret.” [Considering breast enlargement]*

Respondents who were considering using a procedure also suggested that, if the results were not visible, then the success of the procedure may be limited.

*“Why keep it secret? If it hasn’t made a visible change what was the point of the procedure?”*

*“Hopefully the difference would be significant enough to invite comment and so would be unable to deny it had been done.” [Considering dermal fillers, cosmetic dentistry, liposuction, breast enlargement]*

### **Unashamed of stance / decision**

The assertion that respondents were unashamed of their decision to use cosmetic procedures was cited several times.

*“I don’t feel it is anything to be ashamed of. I don’t find the arguments against cosmetic procedures to be compelling and there is little stigma attached to orthodontic procedures in any case.” [User of cosmetic orthodontic procedures]*

*“Why lie? People said I looked younger so I shared the secret!” [User of a range of skin treatments, and liposuction]*

*“Wasn’t something I was ashamed of, and it worked. I both feel better and looked better.” [User of abdominoplasty, liposuction, breast reduction]*

Similar views were expressed by those who had seriously considered undergoing a cosmetic procedure.

*“I’m not ashamed of considering operations, a lot of people have these procedures done, and even if they didn’t, I’ve become extremely comfortable in myself to tell people what I’m thinking.” [Considering laser and other light treatments; liposuction; and breast reduction]*

*“I don’t feel the need to keep it secret - I am not ashamed about it. I am actually more ashamed of my body now and try to keep it fairly well covered.” [Considering wide range of procedures]*

### **Procedures that are not ‘vain’**

A small number of respondents indicated that they would tell others about their decision to user cosmetic procedures, or their thoughts about undergoing a procedure in the future because the procedure in question was either for health or function rather than for ‘vanity’.

*“This was not a “vanity” project for me and I wasn’t ashamed to tell people. It was a serious procedure to improve my health as well as my quality of life when I had worked hard to do that already by losing weight which I had been carrying since a child.” [User of abdominoplasty]*

*“Why shouldn’t I, it’s not for beauty reasons it’s for need” [Considering laser / other light treatments]*



### ***'If asked outright...'***

Some respondents qualified their open approach by noting that they would only disclose their decisions if they were to be asked an outright question about their changed appearance.

*"I'm a private person but would tell if asked outright by someone." (laser / other light, cosmetic dentistry, liposuction, breast enlargement)*

*"If they ask about the laser, I'm honest. I don't mention the Botox because I've never done it. I wonder if people would notice and ask."*

*"I wouldn't brag and tell everyone I met but if someone were to ask me I don't see why I would lie. I'm not embarrassed about having them."  
[considering a wide range of procedures]*

### ***Other individual responses: disclosers***

In addition to the explanations to indicate a willingness to tell others set out above, a range of other responses were also offered by single respondents, including:

#### *To support others considering a procedure*

*"I don't want to be known or remembered for how I looked before. But I would tell people if I felt it would give them the confidence to have surgery themselves if they were contemplating it, over something that was causing them considerable distress."*

#### *Telling necessary due to post-procedure complications*

*"I had to tell family and friends because I got a post-operative infection and had to take time off sixth form while I healed enough to wear clothes."  
[Labioplasty user]*

#### *The ubiquity of procedures*

*"so many people get it done these days that unless you get so much done you look plastic then people do not tend to judge anymore."*

### **Respondents who indicated that they would keep it secret**

#### ***Embarrassment / shame***

A frequent reason given by respondents who indicated a decision to withhold information about cosmetic procedures focused on potential embarrassment or shame in the decision they made, or are considering making. These feelings, however, were embedded in a range of contexts.

One female respondent, for example, notes that her decision to undergo rhinoplasty "was done in secret as I felt some embarrassment / shame as it seemed as if I was rejecting my racial heritage (mixed Japanese, black American)."

Other respondents suggest that their stance on cosmetic procedures could be shameful because undergoing those procedures are perceived to be vain.

*“Embarrassed to admit vanity”*

*“There is a shame associated with having a cosmetic procedure. The assumption is that you are vain / superficial, rather than feel miserable and inadequate. There is also the shame of being regarded as a fake.”*

This comment on the ‘fakeness’ of cosmetic procedures was also noted by another respondent who suggested that to undergo a procedure “feels fake / like cheating”.

The financial commitment involved in undergoing a cosmetic procedure was also noted in the context of ‘shame’ by a respondent who indicated that she had considered undergoing a range of cosmetic procedures BUT felt that “[it’s] shameful to spend that kind of money on one’s body. Better spent on one’s children or charity.”

A further respondent suggested that indicating a willingness to consider cosmetic procedures could undermine her feminist views:

*“I wouldn’t lie. But I wouldn’t make a thing of telling people either. Partly because, as a feminist, I feel it doesn’t fit with my beliefs and I’d be embarrassed, and wouldn’t want to publicly normalise cosmetic surgery either.” [Considering breast augmentation]*

A similar view was put forward by another respondent who noted that “I work within an academic sector and appearance is not something other females I work with see as a priority.”

### **Concern over ‘being judged’**

Concerns over ‘being judged’ by other were also raised frequently by respondents who indicated a desire to keep their use of cosmetic procedures secret.

*“I think it can change people’s opinions on you” [User of dermal fillers, and breast enlargement]*

*“They would judge me as vain. It is none of their business.” [User of liposuction, breast enlargement, and facial needling]*

Similar views were also put forward by respondents who seriously considered undergoing cosmetic procedures.

*“It is a superficial concern that I associate with more superficial persons. I feel I would be judged.” [Considering laser and other light treatments, cosmetic dentistry, injections to relax wrinkles, and facelift]*

*“I felt like people would judge me for wanting surgery. You are supposed to love your body the way it is. Wanting surgery makes your insecurities so transparent, we’re told a million times that confidence is sexy and preoccupation with looks is vanity.” [Considering breast enlargement and liposuction]*

*“Prejudice I assume people have against those who have decided to have surgery - i.e. they are vain, unintelligent, buying into media projections of the feminine ideal, and are anti-feminist.” [Considering breast enlargement and liposuction]*

The judgment of others was also a cause for concern from respondents who suggested that, through disclosing their views on cosmetic procedures, they could make themselves vulnerable to comments on their appearance.

*“Because being open about it would require being open about my body neuroses - this feels like a vulnerable position to be in. Also because being open about it would make people feel as if I was inviting them to discuss my body - which I am not keen on doing.” [Considering laser and other light treatments, and breast enlargement]*

*“I would not want people to know that I felt so badly about myself that I needed to change, I would just want to be different without having to defend myself or explain my decisions to anyone.” [Considering rhinoplasty, liposuction, and breast enlargement]*

*“I don’t want to be looked at differently because of it. It’s nobody’s business but mine. I rather have people guessing. I guess I wish I was better looking and don’t want to show my vulnerability.” [User of injections to relax wrinkles, dermal fillers, and rhinoplasty]*

### **Maintaining perception of ‘natural’ looks**

A number of respondents also noted that they would keep their views and actions on cosmetic procedures secret because they would like “to remain or perceived as naturally beautiful”.

*“I would like people to believe this is the way I look naturally.” [Considering a range of facial procedures]*

*“If I thought I could get away without telling anyone then I would. Because you want people to think you look ‘good’ naturally rather than because you’ve had ‘work’. It is seen as ‘cheating’ and therefore not as valuable as if it’s ‘natural’.” [User of injections to relax wrinkles, laser / other light treatments, cosmetic dentistry, rhinoplasty, and breast reduction]*

*“It would bother me to try and make people believe it was natural when I took enhancement measures.” [Considering laser / other light treatments, non-surgical cellulite procedures]*

### **Maintaining privacy**

A small number of respondents noted that their decision or stance was a personal and private matter. For example, one respondent who indicated that she was considering undergoing a facelift stated: “This is my body and my life. I would not tell, but would not feel ashamed if this was known.”

### **“It depends”**

In addition to respondents who firmly indicated their decision to either tell or to keep their views / decisions a secret, other respondents suggested that their response to the question depended on the procedure in question, or on the recipients of their disclosure.

### **Procedure-dependent**

The relevance of the procedure in question was particularly highlighted by respondents' views on non-surgical procedures.

*"I quite openly told friends about the Botox treatments as it seems almost standard, normal these days."*

*"I was quite open about having had lip fillers due to the small amount of filler used and temporary results. I am not sure I would be as open about having a more expensive, invasive and permanent type of surgery, however."*

*"I tell people about my tooth. Being corrective, it feels more legitimate, and no one has ever negatively judged my having it fixed. I don't tell people about the lipo. It was from a time in which I was less critical of the world, and more critical of myself."*

*"It depends what it was – if it was something that obviously changed my appearance then I wouldn't be able to keep it secret. If it was laser hair removal then I would tell people because I think it's just a longer lasting form of hair removal."*

### **Dependent on who's being told**

Several respondents indicated that they would only tell, or have only told, a selected group of people, particularly friends and family, or those whom the respondent felt could be trusted.

#### *Friends and family*

*"Whilst this wouldn't be something I broadcast, I think if I was willing to have any procedure, I would find it normal to tell my family and friends about it."*

*"[I would] only tell those very close to me because I would like support to go through it."*

*"I would... tell boyfriends if I were to have breast enlargement."*

#### *Other trusted parties*

*"I would tell people who are close to me."*

*"[Those] I trust and who can understand the journey I have been on."*

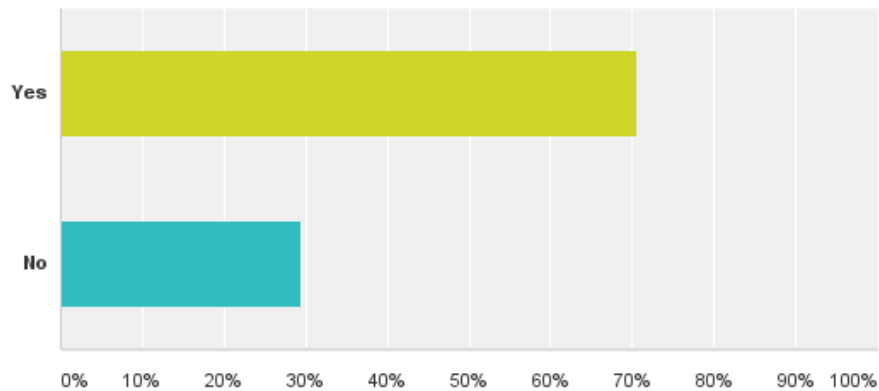
*"I wouldn't tell everyone, but people I trust yes."*

*"I would not tell people I didn't know now."*

## Question 6

### Q6 Do you think life might be different after a cosmetic procedure?

Answered: 369 Skipped: 79



This question was visible to each respondent, regardless of whether they had undergone, considered, or never considered having a cosmetic procedure.

Responses to the tick-box part of this question showed that 70 per cent (n=260) thought that life might be different after a cosmetic procedure; 30 per cent felt that it would not be different (n=109). In addition to indicating their thoughts through completing the tick-box exercise, a significant number of respondents also offered substantive comments in the free-text boxes provided.

Analysis for these free-text responses has been divided according to respondents' answers to Question 1.

#### Respondents who have undergone cosmetic procedures

The conditional approach of this question was not relevant for those who indicated that they had already undergone a cosmetic procedure, who were able to draw on their own experiences as to whether they thought that life was, or was not, 'different' following their procedure. Most respondents in this category indicated that life was different, with just a handful stating that life had not changed.

#### ***Life is different***

A range of reasons were offered by respondents who had undergone a cosmetic procedure, and felt that their life was 'different' in some way.

#### *Improvements in confidence*

Several respondents in this category indicated that since undergoing a cosmetic procedure, their confidence had grown and improved.

*“I felt more confident to wear my hair up and show my ears (I previously used to always wear my hair over my ears)” [User of otoplasty]*

*“I’m certainly a lot more confident. I do feel much more womanly, and frankly spend very little money on (2nd hand) clothes as I don’t need to worry so much about proportion (I was very pear shaped, small breasts, large thighs so I did feel out of proportion and not feminine. It occupied my thoughts all the time. I’m still short and could lose a few pounds but at least I feel more proportioned.)” [User of breast enlargement]*

*“Able to wear different hairstyles. More confident” [User of laser / other light treatments]*

*“so much more confident, actually less concerned with how I look not more afterwards because the thing I was always most fixated on was fixed. I feel normal” [User of cosmetic dentistry, otoplasty, maxillofacial surgery]*

*“Life is better as self-esteem increased.” [User of breast reduction]*

*“Fell much more relaxed and comfortable in my skin. Smile more. Feel okay going without make up now.” [User of cosmetic dentistry; blepharoplasty]*

### *Improvements to happiness*

Some respondents stated their happiness had improved after using cosmetic procedures.

*“You can be happier” [User of dermal fillers; breast enlargement]*

*“It helped me, it was really successful, simple and uplifting – in every way.” [User of blepharoplasty]*

*“My procedure was a success: my teeth were rendered into a more pleasing shape and I gained increased confidence as a direct consequence of this. I am happier. Whether I ought to have developed confidence and happiness from this, or whether I should have simply come to accept my previous physical lot, is a very different question!” [User of cosmetic orthodontics]*

### *Alleviation of discomfort*

A reduction in physical discomfort was also noted by respondents to this question.

*“My life is different. I no longer have skin infections and I am more comfortable, literally, in my own skin.”*

*“My life has improved dramatically after my breast reduction [...] I no longer have back pain.”*

*“I would have less pre-menstrual fluid retention and discomfort, clothes would fit better, exercise would be more comfortable and I would feel better psychologically about the way I both looked and felt.” [User of abdominoplasty]*

### *Easier ‘body maintenance’*

Easier ‘body maintenance’ was noted a small number of respondents.

*“No need to take care of my body hair anymore.”*

*“I got chunks of my life back that had been spent plucking / waxing / shaving.”*



### *Depends on the procedure*

Respondents also suggested that whether cosmetic procedures make life 'different' may depend on the procedure which has been used.

*"The dental procedure fixed my issue completely. I felt confident in smiling without covering my face for the first time in my life. There was no underlying psychological issue, so the problem was gone. The liposuction procedure didn't change my dysmorphia. I still hated and hid my body, and the poor experience added to my sense of low worth. The underlying psychology was untouched by the procedure."*

*"For more marginal procedures like fillers and botox, the advantages are likely to be minor. Hair transplants can result in huge gains in self-confidence. Other procedures like rhinoplasty can become problematic if patients already have a degree of body dysmorphia" [User of dermal fillers, cosmetic dentistry, hair transplant]*

*"Rhinoplasty - absolutely no difference anticipated or expected. Done for myself only. Botox - appearing younger might improve chances professional / job."*

### **Life would be negatively different**

A small number of respondents also observed that life might be different in negative ways:

*"Lasting pain, aftermath of hospital experience, prospects of future operations" [User of breast reconstruction]*

*"In my case no, in other cases, yes, where people become addicted to invasive cosmetic surgery." [User of various skin treatments]*

### **Life might be different: equivocal responses**

However, some respondents gave an equivocal response to the question as to whether life might be different after using cosmetic procedures.

*"I think it could go either way. It might be worse. Might cause problems or be depressing to think I had changed myself for a stupid reason. Or might be confidence enhancing and great. It's the big Unknown!" [User of laser / other light treatments; skin-lightening; cosmetic dentistry; breast procedures]*

*"I was pleased to have it done and with the result but it was not done with the intention of changing my life. I wished it had been done years earlier." [User of facial mole removal]*

*"Yes to some extent. I don't think it would alter the most important aspects to a person's life, such as family and health, but some surgeries can help with practicalities, such as buying clothing that fits. For some people the additional confidence might alter their QoL but this is not the case for me." [User of breast enlargement; injections to relax wrinkles]*

### **Life is the same**

Of the small number of respondents who stated explicitly that life had remained the same since undergoing cosmetic procedures, comments included:



*"I have come to realise that the problems in my life were psychological and not physical." [User of dermabrasion]*

*"I don't think life would be different, but it made me feel better in myself" [Breast lift]*

*"It helps me feel better, but it has little effect on "life"." [User of laser / other light treatments]*

*"Life is the same, but personally I prefer my appearance, but the way people respond to me has not changed." [User of cosmetic dentistry]*

*"Life doesn't change just because you change outwardly - change must come from within. I started getting laser on my upper lip when I was 13 because I was made fun of so cruelly by the boys in my class. However, even after the laser, I was still teased but just for another reason. What changed was my outlook towards the people making fun of me and how I responded to their comments."*

## **Seriously considering cosmetic procedures**

### ***Life might be different***

Most of those seriously considering a cosmetic procedure suggested that, hypothetically, life might be 'different' in positive ways. Several respondents, for example, stated an anticipation that confidence would grow after using procedures, including:

*"I imagine that my self-confidence would improve." [Considering breast enlargement]*

*"Less self-consciousness around my body." [Considering hair transplant]*

*"I would like to think I would feel better about myself." [Considering rhinoplasty; liposuction; breast augmentation]*

*"Increased confidence and more positive body image" [considering adult male circumcision]*

*"For myself it would hopefully raise my confidence in my body, and also psychologically feel better" [injections to relax wrinkles, chemical peels, liposuction, blepharoplasty]*

*"Although I would opt for a more subtle change of appearance because I am still young, I believe that even if it has no impact on my social or private life, I will feel more confident in myself and I think this probably would improve my life, both socially and privately." [Considering a wide range of procedures]*

*"I would hope I would feel more confident about my body but also would worry that this would not be the case" [Liposuction, breast augmentation]*

### ***Wearing clothes***

Respondents also suggested that the way they dress and present themselves may contribute to a 'different life'.

*"Breast reduction would allow me to dress the way I like and reduce back pain."*

*"I would hope to have less back, neck and shoulder pain. I think if my breasts were reduced from an H cup to a D cup, I would more easily be*

*able to find clothes to fit.” [Considering various procedures, including breast reduction]*

*“I would feel more comfortable in situations in which I would take my top off (e.g. bathing, sexual encounters, etc.).” [Considering funnel chest removal]*

*“feeling better about my body i.e. not covering up my belly/worrying that my belly might be exposed. clothes fitting will be easier. skin care will be easier as currently skin under flap gets sweaty” [Considering abdominoplasty]*

### *Positive physical impact*

Physical changes were also anticipated as making ‘life different’:

*“Some types of cosmetic surgery also have a positive physical impact on people. For example, a breast reduction can help relieve shoulder and back pain. It can also give the woman a more balanced look in proportion with the rest of her body.” [Considering abdominoplasty and breast reduction]*

*“I know my back wouldn’t hurt anymore (fingers crossed), and I’d have less cleavage for people to stare at, possibly making me less interesting upon first appearance.” [Considering breast reduction, liposuction, light and laser treatments]*

### *Changes to others’ reactions*

Some respondents felt that others’ reactions may change positively as a result of using cosmetic procedures.

*“people will like me more. I don’t have any disfigurements technically but do feel ugly” [Considering cosmetic dentistry, rhinoplasty, and breast enlargement]*

*“My body would be smaller and I think people might engage differently with me” [Considering liposuction]*

A more negative approach to future relationships with others was also put forward:

*“Your relationships with the people around you might differ as each individual has their opinion on cosmetic procedures and their acceptance of having it within their close circle of friends. People in general are also a lot more judgmental when it comes to cosmetic surgery / procedures.” [Considering cosmetic dentistry; breast enlargement]*

*“It would change other people’s perceptions of you. It would change the way you looked at yourself - not in the way one hoped I imagine.” [Considering liposuction; breast augmentation]*

Conflicted views on others’ responses to undergoing a cosmetic procedure were also observed:

*“It would definitely be different. I worry that if I were to have a breast enlargement I would find myself being sexualised more in public. I would hate that. But I also feel it would make me more confident. I suppose I will never know.” [Considering breast enlargement]*

*“Yes if you looked different people might react to you differently or not recognise you, and you could feel different. For example, if a woman got large breast implants then she might get men staring at her or she might get back pain from the weight. People might go on to get multiple treatments – e.g. they begin with having a nose job and then decide have a facelift and liposuction etc.” [Considering laser / other light treatments]*

### **Life would be negatively different**

Other respondents felt that, although life might be different after a cosmetic procedure, that ‘difference’ may not always be positive.

*“I feel if I had gone ahead with the procedure maybe I wouldn’t be so disgusted by my nose, but I also think I’d feel ashamed of what I had done. I also imagine it might feel a bit like it wasn’t really you.” [Considering cosmetic dentistry and rhinoplasty]*

More negatively, a respondent considering cosmetic dentistry and rhinoplasty noted that “you’d be dreading having it repaired again.” Similarly negative conceptions of a ‘different life’ were also offered by respondents.

*“But not necessarily in a good way. Looking more attractive may give confidence but there would always be the nagging knowledge that it was not naturally acquired and was only ‘skin deep’.”*

*“If your life is not going to alter in any way, I think you can question why you would do a procedure. I think my life would be different, but only superficially so - going back to my laser hair removal example, my life would be different because I hope I would not need to shave as much.”*

*“Yes and No. I think your personal outlook may change but your physical characteristics  $\neq$  your personality and mental characteristics. Whilst you may receive a boost from such a procedure, it is unlikely that it would fundamentally alter who you are as a person.”*

Other respondents anticipated that the prospect of undergoing a procedure on a specific part of their body may lead to a desire to change another part of their body.

*“A breast enlargement may have allowed me to feel more normal and increased my choice in clothes / lingerie but I am sure I would have still been the same person inside and may have developed issues with other areas of my appearance. I don’t think it would have made me happier. I’d then worry about having false breasts instead of lovely natural albeit very small ones.”*

*“Looking different is like giving in to a whim. It won’t change the thoughts and if it did I think it would be only temporary until the next procedure.”*

### **Life would not be different**

A small number of respondents who indicated that they were seriously considering having a cosmetic procedure stated that life would not change. Several who did indicate this view, however, observed that a procedure could be a positive ‘small change’ – which could make them feel ‘better’ about their looks – but would not have a significant impact on their life more generally.

*“life would be the same just one small thing would have changed.”  
[Considering cosmetic dentistry, liposuction, and breast enlargement]*

*“I would like better my image but this would certainly not change my life.”  
[Considering facelift]*

*“I don’t believe that a procedure could change my life. Perhaps add to me feeling better about a small part of myself, however this may also not be the case.” [Considering cosmetic dentistry]*

*“My life will be the same. I just may feel better about how my body looks at certain times.” [Considering laser and other light treatments, and non-surgical cellulite procedures]*

*“I’d be a little happier with my appearance, but it wouldn’t be life-changing.”  
[Considering procedure for double chin]*

*“Fundamentally, no. It would simply make me more physically attractive.”  
[Considering various facial procedures]*

*“If I woke up looking like Brad Pitt, that might change things, but I dare say that current procedures aren’t exactly life changing.” [Considering cosmetic procedures in general]*

A further respondent also suggested that the difference post-procedure may be temporary:

*“It might feel different for a day or two, but then the different usually becomes normal.” [Considering laser treatments, cosmetic dentistry]*

### **Never had, or thought seriously about having, a cosmetic procedure**

A number of respondents who have never had, nor seriously considered having, a cosmetic procedure stated that life might be different. Some respondents provided general comments on their reasons for their response; whereas others felt that any ‘difference’ may be positive or negative.

#### ***Life might be different generally***

##### *Response from others*

Several respondents stated that life might be different after using cosmetic procedures due to responses from other people.

*“People would notice and I would have to explain to them why I did the procedure.”*

*“I think other people might look at me differently.”*

*“When you look different, people react to you differently. Better? Worse? Not sure but likely a little of both.”*

*“Other people’s perception would probably change (especially if the cosmetic procedure was a very noticeable one).”*

*“If others noticed the change in one’s appearance (which is, I understand, the point of cosmetic surgery. If others fail to notice a change, the surgery achieves nothing) then their opinions of one will likely change upon the realisation that cosmetic surgery is the cause of the change. One’s social circles may change.”*

*“I think friends and family might think differently about me, and think I was more concerned with my appearance.”*

*“Perception at first glance makes an impact on people’s opinions of you.”*

*“I guess if it significantly changes your appearance that may take some getting used to, as would any differences in the way people reacted to you.”*

One respondent also suggests that her own behaviour with other people might change as a result of the procedure.

*“I think I might act differently in front of other people after having the procedure.”*

### **‘Feeling’ different**

Some respondents suggest that life might be different as a result of ‘feeling’ different following a procedure.

*“I think I would feel differently about the part of me that was changed by the procedure.”*

*“I think I’d feel differently about myself, maybe feeling like I wasn’t confident enough to accept how I looked before.”*

*“Your own body or part thereof will have changed and so there will be different perceptions of who you are and you yourself would be bound to ‘feel’ different/relieved/smug!”*

### **Life might be different: positive**

#### *Increased happiness and confidence*

Respondents observed that some people who have a cosmetic procedure may be very unhappy with their appearance, and therefore may experience positive changes to their lives – for example, through improved self-confidence – as a result of the procedures they undergo.

*“I think someone who was desperately unhappy with a part of their physical appearance could gain more confidence and really live a fuller life.”*

*“If it was successful and the person was happy with the result it may lead to an increase in confidence that would help the person to do things that they may have shied away from before.”*

*“I think if someone has a feature that causes them real distress e.g. a scar, large nose, non-existent breasts, cosmetic surgery may improve their life.”*

*“... if it changed something that you felt very self-conscious about then you might have improved self-esteem and less anxiety, and that would make a difference.”*

*“If you suffer from a severe lack of confidence about the way you look then an improvement in confidence would make a huge difference.”*

*“It may be beneficial if you have a problem that you wish to correct, e.g. a facial disfigurement, obvious scar, broken nose. It may give you more confidence if you undertook the procedure for cosmetic reasons. It may reduce your quality of life if recovery was not as quick as anticipated, results were not as expected or the operation went wrong.”*

*“I suppose if a person is lacking self-esteem or is very focused on this one aspect of their body, having cosmetic surgery may help to increase*



*positive feelings and develop greater confidence. It can also, however, lead to unwanted results and thus negative feelings.”*

*“If I were to have a feature that I felt was embarrassing - a feature that made me feel different - a feature that people obviously looked at and then shied away from - then I might well contemplate cosmetic procedures - for afterwards I might feel less unusual - less different - less of an anomaly and better to go about my business in society without being noticed.”*

*“my cousin had her nose made smaller after many years and she seemed more confident afterwards.”*

### **Life might be different: negative**

#### *Others' reactions*

Although some respondents stated that others' reactions might change in general terms (see above) others suggest that their reactions could contribute to life being different in negative ways following a procedure.

*“I would probably be hit on by men more if I, say, dramatically increased the size of my breasts (which are relatively tiny) and decreased the size of my waist! I wouldn't see this as a desirable development”.*

*“I think people with cosmetic surgery don't realise that people also judge them negatively. Having surgery may change your appearance, but it is also overtly says something about your values and insecurities. I think this aspect could change your life insofar as people treat you differently.”*

*“... anyone who noticed might think I was a bit weird.”*

*“People would treat you differently, mostly negatively because people would argue we were hiding or pretending to be something you're not.”*

*“People would stare and wonder what on earth had happened. I think my friends and family would be concerned. I would if they did it.”*

*“Yes. My family will never admit me as part of family.”*

#### *Behavioural changes*

Other respondents felt that life might be different because users of cosmetic procedures would experience behavioural changes post-procedure.

*“It will affect your behaviour and your attitudes. Some people might become more self-confident, others might wonder whether people around them realize they had surgery and yet others might regret that they did it. Depending on how you react to the surgery, it could also change your worldview (e.g. if you become more self-confident, you cannot understand, why other people don't do it too...).”*

*“a cosmetic procedure may change the way a person sees himself / herself and may then affect his / her behaviour.”*

#### *Focus on the 'next' procedure*

Respondents also suggested that, should people undergo cosmetic procedures, their lives could be made 'different' due to the subsequent increased likelihood of exploring the possibility of further procedures.

*“I suspect that, had I had a more aquiline nose, I’d have been happier with my appearance. I’ve also considered the possibility that, once having had THAT procedure, if it had been successful and I’d had enough spare cash to consider having ‘further work’ done on my face, I might have taken that option.”*

*“One could be dissatisfied with the outcome. One could be extremely happy with the outcome. One could then transfer one’s dissatisfaction with oneself to another part of the body (or have depression or mental symptoms). One could get into a cycle of repeated cosmetic operations.”*

### *Identity*

Respondents also suggest that a changes to a person’s identity might make life different for them after using cosmetic procedures.

*“I think one’s sense of identity is closely tied to appearance. So a change of appearance is likely to change the way one sees oneself.”*

*“I suspect it alters more than one’s appearance; i.e. one’s identity if probably impacted.”*

*“I would feel somehow less true to myself - less “authentic”, perhaps. I feel uncomfortable with myself after I have had my hair cut or trimmed my beard, because it feels that I have done something quite shallow, in terms of altering my appearance. (Okay, I know that sounds slightly mad, but it is true!)”*

*“You’d become a strange person, someone who does something unnatural to their body.”*

*“It’s not only the way you look, but I believe it affects your personality. Everything in you needs to adapt to the “new you”, such as habits (after the surgery perhaps you can’t expose direct to sunlight, etc.), wardrobe (because of your new implant breast, you will change your dresses, bikinis, etc.), personality, etc.”*

### *Future physical effects*

A small number of respondents state that the life might be different due to physical impact in the future.

*“Breast implants would require replacement and there are possible future health risks to consider”*

*“One might of course be damaged by the procedure. One also might be disappointed by its impact - and feel that the dream of a new life had not materialised.”*

### **Life would not be different**

Several respondents who have never considered undergoing a cosmetic procedure felt that life would *not* be different following the procedure.

*Cosmetic procedures unlikely to satisfy or address aims of undertaking them*



Several respondents suggested life would not be different because undergoing cosmetic procedures would not address the underlying aims of undertaking them, such as unhappiness.

*“I know enough about the research to know people who have surgery are rarely satisfied with results and even if they are, they soon move on to another part of their body they wish to change.”*

*“You may discover that the procedure had not improved your life or how you feel about yourself and this may increase your depression / body dysmorphia.”*

*“I think it affects your perception of yourself. Life doesn’t really change. People delude themselves that it might help them.”*

*“If people are unhappy before surgery, I believe that they will be just as unhappy afterwards. Surgery is not an answer and may bring them more health problems than they had before.”*

*“Cosmetic surgery is a choice people make if they are dissatisfied with the reality of their natural looks. Their inner vanity makes it more likely that new dissatisfaction will soon occur with their ‘new’ look - so nothing will change.”*

A similar view was adopted by a recipient who drew from their own experience of knowing someone who had used cosmetic procedures.

*“I knew a woman who had liposuction. She thought it would get her closer to having the ballerina body she longed for. Unfortunately, her natural build was far from that of a ballerina and no amount of surgery would change that. She was just as unhappy after the surgery as before.”*

### *Identity remains the same*

It was also suggested that life would remain the same because the recipient’s identity similarly remains the same.

*“Why should it? You are still the same person.”*

### **“It depends”**

A number of respondents made equivocal submissions to this question, suggesting, for example, that any changes to ‘life’ after a cosmetic procedure might depend on the individuals involved; and the circumstances those individuals find themselves in.

### *Dependent on the individual*

*“I think life wouldn’t really change that much, unless life for you is just appearance. It might mean a lot to many people, not to me.”*

*“I know of people who have had plastic surgery and it has made them really happy. Conversely there are people whose lives have been ruined by things going wrong (though I’ve never met one of those people) and I understand for some people the result has been rather neutral.”*

*“It depends on the person. If someone is having such issues with their appearance that it is causing them problems in life, then yes.”*

*“For some people, it may provide them with more confidence in all sorts of areas of their lives (work, hobbies, relationships, etc.) - for others though, it may cause unwanted complications or not have had the*

*intended outcome either physically or in terms of possible emotional benefits expected”*

*Dependent on the circumstances*

*“Highly dependent on reasons for having it. If for vanity maybe less than happy with results as surgery not fulfilling the deeper psychological need that made surgery attractive. If it was to improve quality of life e.g. straightening a deviated septum you might be thrilled with the results.”*

*“I think it could give some people more confidence but depends on the procedure and on the reason someone decides to have it.”*

*“It could bring joy or complications depending on the outcome of the procedure.”*

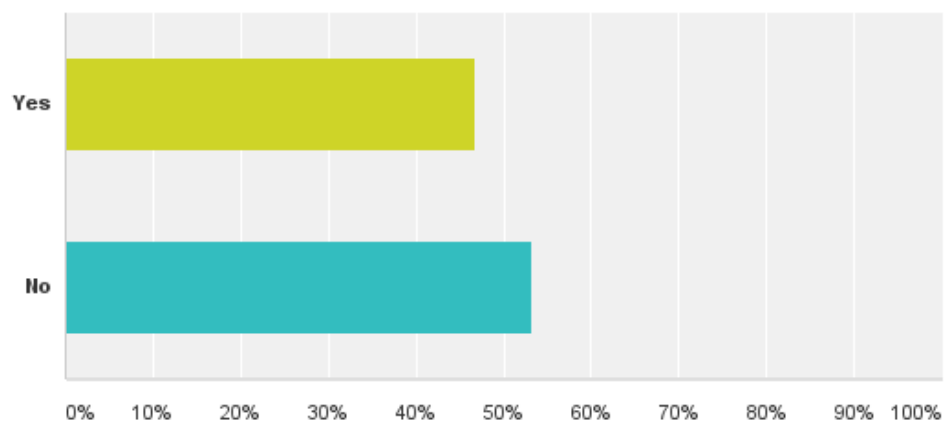
## Attitudes to cosmetic procedures – for a friend or relative

**Question 7: Imagine a good friend or relative has a facial or bodily feature that is not regarded as conventionally attractive.**

(Visible to all respondents, regardless of response to Question 1)

**Q7 Do you think that they would be happier if they had a cosmetic procedure to change their appearance?**

Answered: 334 Skipped: 114



### General comments across all respondent categories

Across the 'categories' of respondents (i.e., those who had undergone cosmetic procedures, had thought about it, or had neither undergone nor thought about undergoing a cosmetic procedure), several comments indicated that the question was too general, and that more specific details would be necessary in order to engage fully with the question. Others state that they cannot answer the question because it requires a degree of hypothesising with an "imaginary other". Several respondents therefore suggest that they would welcome a 'maybe' option and that their answer would 'depend' on a number of variables. These views are included in the summary below.

### Respondents who had undergone cosmetic procedures

Responses were split relatively evenly between those who indicated 'yes' and those who responded 'no'. Several respondents also chose to support their answers in the free text boxes provided.

#### Yes, they would be happier

##### **Self-confidence**

A number of respondents in this category stated that their friend may be happier as a result of improvements to self-confidence.

*“Self-confidence, look younger, better careers prospects if looking aesthetically pleasing.”*

*“If it was lowering their confidence / stopping them doing things.”*

*“They’ll feel better about themselves.”*

*“For many (most?), I feel it would boost their self-confidence, but for some, it could be a rash decision, soon regretted.”*

*“If it is causing them to be unhappy then 100% they should change that area as it can boost confidence and also reduce unwanted comments from people.”*

*“If they really feel bad about themselves, about a specific part of their body, I think yes, it might help.”*

### **Reaction from others**

Some respondents suggest that their friend’s or relative’s happiness may increase as a result of others’ reactions.

*“The new acceptance in society (lack of comment or staring) may stop and improve their life experience and confidence may increase.”*

*“Conventional attractiveness is not a standard of beauty, but singular “defects” can often influence first impressions. And in the era of snap judgement, vis a vis social media, and social interactions, this may be a handicap, better resolved.”*

*“If something makes you feel bad or gets you singled out for ridicule, something that is not “conventionally attractive” or in fashion, then I would support a friend in removing an obstacle to her feeling happy. And yes, I think they would be happier.”*

### **The importance of appearance**

It was also suggested that appearance is important within society, and therefore procedures to change their friend’s or relative’s appearance may lead to increases in their happiness.

*“I believe appearance is an important factor in society. I feel if someone has a concern about their appearance and they perceive it could be different for the better, yes I believe they would be happier.”*

### **No, they would not be happier**

#### **Happiness not affected by appearance**

A number of respondents stated that their hypothetical friend or relative would not be happier following a cosmetic procedure because appearance does not affect a person’s happiness.

*“Happiness doesn’t come as a result of surgery. That doesn’t mean that surgery is ethically wrong per se.”*

*“Doesn’t change how you feel on the inside.”*

*“Happiness is not only dependent on appearance. It is important to accept yourself the way you are and embrace your body. However, if a facial or bodily feature bothers someone so much that their self-confidence*

*(dramatically) decreases, I don't see a reason why they shouldn't have a procedure."*

*"... you should be happy with what you have and how you look. Life is not about how you look."*

*"Unless the individual them self is unhappy with their appearance they are unlikely to be happier after the procedure."*

### **Temporary happiness**

The view that if their friend or relative has one procedure it can lead to a decision to have another procedure was offered by one respondent.

*"They would just move onto the next body 'flaw' to correct it."*

Another respondent suggests, similarly, that any happiness would be temporary:

*"At first you feel happier but when you think about it or when you are older and more mature you feel worse... It is not your body... It is a mask"*

### **It depends...**

Even though most respondents ticked yes / no, their free text answers indicate that a number of those who responded to this question felt that their hypothetical friend's or relative's happiness 'depends' on a number of factors, including:

- Whether the recipient was acting on their own wishes, or the perceived wishes of others

*"... only if they thought so themselves. If it doesn't bother them, there is no reason to succumb to outside pressure."*

*"But only if it was something they wanted to do, it increases your confidence to go out and meet people, at job interviews etc. good to not be embarrassed about a feature that then leaves you more able to focus on the task at hand."*

- The individual in question

*"Totally depends on the individual and their self-confidence."*

*"Maybe, it invariably would vary person to person. Some may get addicted, never be happy. Others satisfied when the single issue was resolved."*

*"Each person is different and has different views about it. Also they might not care in the slightest about having a facial or bodily feature that is unconventionally unattractive, therefore still be confident."*

- The type of procedure

*"... if it's an extreme case of ears sticking out really badly, and it's such a simple case of easily pinning them back, or teeth that stick out badly that could easily be fixed with a brace, I'd think why not, if the patient wants it. But all surgery carries dangers, I'd never recommend it, they'd have to decide for themselves."*

- The visibility or 'unusualness' of the feature

*“If it’s a giant mole they could easily whip off that might make them happier.”*

*“It depends on whether the feature is dramatically different from other people, or just slightly.”*

- How much the feature affects their enjoyment of daily life  
*“... whether the person would be ‘happier’ depends on their relationship with the feature in question and how the feature affects their daily interactions with self and others.”*
- What other people say to them  
*“You only feel unattractive if people tell you. I wouldn’t comment on something like that and know the impact it had on me.”*
- If the procedure did not lead to complications  
*“Yes, if they chose a great doctor and did not have complications”*
- The friend’s or relative’s mental health  
*“I feel as long as my friend or relative was psychologically normal, as in appearance did not dictate their happiness, then yes I think they would be happier.”*
- If they talk it through  
*“I would never encourage anyone to have elective surgery unless it was something they felt was their only option to regain a quality of life and they had talked it through very carefully with someone appropriate first.”*

### **No tick box indicated**

A small number of respondents who indicated that they had undergone a cosmetic procedure stated that they felt that they were unable to answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to this question, and so ticked neither box. Reasons stated for an inability to answer unequivocally include that any answer must depend on circumstances, or on the friend or relative in question. One respondent notes:

*“Can’t tick a box on this one as it entirely depends on the circumstances. Some people are so bothered by something that it can have an adverse effect on their physical and mental health. In those cases, I think the surgery (if successful) probably would make them happier. But for others, having a ‘conventionally unattractive’ feature doesn’t bother them and so they have nothing to gain from cosmetic surgery.”*

### **Respondents who are considering or have seriously considered cosmetic procedures**

Responses were split relatively evenly between those who answered ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to this question for the ‘tick box’ part of the question. However, the free text responses received suggest the more common view among this subset of respondents is that the answer to this question depends on a number of factors.

### **Yes, they would be happier**

Respondents whose tick box and free text responses indicate that their friend's happiness would be improved unequivocally provide a range of reasons for their response.

### **Societal factors**

A number of respondents refer to reasons associated with society in order to support their view that their friend or relative would be happier following a cosmetic procedure.

*"Yes, it could lead to more positive interactions socially and professionally."*

*"Make life easier if people don't judge them on this feature."*

*"Looks are important in how others treat us and this may improve after the procedure. If it improves their confidence, it may also empower them during social interactions."*

*"I imagine that for most women whose career and social life involves a broad range of people and networking, being more conventionally attractive is a significant advantage."*

One respondent suggests that societal factors may need further consideration:

*"Unfortunately we need to change society and its attitudes and values. People's confidence is eroded by the obsession with appearance and a conventional view of beauty."*

### **Improving self-confidence**

Potential improvements to self-confidence were noted as contributory factors for happiness to be attained by people with a feature not considered conventionally attractive.

*"For those who aren't unbelievably confident, as many aren't, I think it will make them happier."*

*"I have seen people suffering from this, hiding the feature, not smiling (bad teeth), wrapping themselves in loose fittings etc. Cosmetic surgery does not and will not solve all their issues but I have seen people feeling better about themselves after such procedures. It can also show that the issues are in fact about something else when no improvement is felt... I have seen also procedures done to pursue a certain fantasised body image, which can turn into addiction."*

*"Yes and no. I would think they don't need surgery but could understand they want to feel more confident."*

*"If it was an affordable option, one family member would consider cosmetic surgery for a large birthmark that has dogged her all her life... A lack of bodily confidence is... evident in this family member."*

*"It is likely that they will themselves feel more positively and confidently about themselves. It is further likely that they will be treated more favourably by others. The only possible detraction may be any sense of artificiality that may creep in, but this should be discountable."*

Commenting on how cosmetic procedures can influence happiness more generally, a respondent notes: "I think everyone would really, if they did not have to pay so much to get it done."



A further general comment was also put forward by another respondent:

*“I don’t believe it’s beyond the range of possibilities that someone would be happier because of this. I think it’s almost trendy to have this attitude that cosmetic surgery can never be a ‘good’ thing or lead to happiness, but I think changing one aspect of your appearance that you don’t like can be a positive experience for that person.”*

### **Drawing on own experience**

In addition to considering a friend in a hypothetical scenario, some respondents note their friends’ actual positive outcomes / experiences of cosmetic procedures in the type of circumstances outlined by the question.

*“A friend who has had the reduction is very happy with the result over ten years down the line. However, for others appearance is linked to many other elements of their lives and so this needs to be considered before/in addition to cosmetic surgery.”*

*“Every person I know who has admitted to surgery has been pleased.”*

*“My friend... felt unattractive because of her rather prominent nose. When it was reduced, we could tell she felt more attractive.”*

*“A friend of mine had rhinoplasty. It was so successful, I didn’t realize at first why I thought she looked prettier and happier. She told me she was happier.”*

### **No, they would not be happier**

A range of free text responses were offered by respondents who felt that their friend or relative would not be happier in the scenario set out by this question.

### **Happiness extends beyond appearance**

*“Happiness is not only based on physical appearance.”*

*“Happiness doesn’t come from external looks. Although saying that, my sister did seem happier (relative term) after her lipo and breast lift.”*

*“It depends on their internal life and confidence. I don’t believe physical changes can make you happier if you are fundamentally unhappy.”*

*“It seems to me as though happiness is often determined by the shortfall between expectations and reality. Since those will come apart anyway (even after the surgery, namely in other aspects of her/his life), it is a more promising approach to learn to live with imperfections. There may be situations in which this does not apply (e.g. when there are many situations in which people respond badly to said feature).”*

*“I think someone’s happiness is more likely to be affected by their relationships, personal or career successes and social environment as just a few factors.”*

Similar arguments were made to support the view that psychological health would not be improved by undertaking a cosmetic procedure to change a feature that is not conventionally attractive.

*“but the underlying thing that would have to be addressed would be their psychological state.”*

*“Unrealistic expectations of cosmetic procedures can be detrimental to psychological well-being. However, that said, cosmetic procedures for those who are accepting of their appearance can have positive effects. So I would say no overall because if someone is happy and satisfied with their appearance, that is the main thing. Procedures can enhance features and boost confidence but not guaranteed.”*

### **Drawing on own experience**

One respondent drew on their own experiences of friends' experiences in order to answer this question in the negative.

*“I have known people who have had boob jobs, nose jobs, and tummy tucks. These people in two cases were driven to it by extreme bullying at school and in one case for complex reasons but suffice it to say she had a very difficult childhood in and out of foster care and her mum wanted to pay for her to have bigger breasts. Of the two that I was closest to their insecurities and “issues” have not gone away. I think in particular when it comes from having been bullied for the way you look that feeling of not being good enough does not go away and psychological therapies would be a lot healthier and kinder.”*

### **It depends...**

Even though most respondents ticked yes / no, their free text answers indicate that a large number of those who responded to this question think that their hypothetical friends' happiness 'depends' on a number of factors. One respondent offers a general comment to illustrate the need to consider a range of factors: “This question is actually impossible to answer without looking at the specific case - how much does the feature upset the person, how far out of the bounds of 'conventionally attractive' is it; is it genuinely unattractive; etc.”

### **On the person**

The view that it 'depends on the person' was offered by a significant number of respondents who had themselves considered using cosmetic procedures.

*“depends if conventional beauty and conforming is important to them.”*

*“I think it depends a lot on the individual's personality. The person I'm thinking of has a facial feature that might be considered unattractive but is very self-assured and wouldn't consider cosmetic surgery. However, not everyone is like this.”*

*“It really depends on the person. I don't think cosmetic procedures should be used as a means of pressure for that person to feel more accepted into society's conventions. If the person is confident in themselves then it isn't necessary, if they aren't confident it is their choice but I would say they should really understand their motivations behind their choice.”*

*“Depending on the person. If their world-view requires being attractive to be contented, then yes. If their world-view doesn't, then no.”*

*“I think if they're fine and can live happily with a facial or bodily feature considered unconventionally attractive then that's great and I'd also think it fine to have surgery to alter said features too if it would make them happier.”*

*“Self-perception is what is important. If my friend could not embrace having, let’s say a big nose, and it affected his / her self-esteem, I think it would be up to my friend to decide if having cosmetic surgery would fix the underlying problem.”*

*“That would depend entirely on the person and their relationship to themselves and their appearance.”*

*“People have procedures for different reasons and one person’s happiness may not be another’s. I think this is completely dependent upon the person and the support that they have around them prior to and post-procedure.”*

*“While I would be happier if a feature I had deemed unattractive by others was improved, I think it is up to the person... some people are really accepting of their own bodies and don’t want to change their unique qualities.”*

### **On the extent to which the feature affects their life**

The effect that the feature has on a person’s life was also felt to be important for assessing whether a person may be happier following a procedure.

*“I have several friends who would like breast reduction as they receive many comments from men and women about their breast size and feel they cannot wear the clothes they wish because of their breast size.”*

*“I think it probably depends on how badly it was affecting their life in the first place. If it was, then I think having a cosmetic procedure may well improve things. But if they are content to look unusual, then they may well feel worse for having the procedure.”*

*“I think that if the feature was bothering them to the point of preoccupation and unfocused behaviour, then sure, they might benefit from having a procedure done, but if they don’t feel like they need/want a procedure, then no absolutely they wouldn’t be happier.”*

*“if the facial or bodily feature was extremely unconventional and was causing them serious distress, affecting their relations with people etc., then in this case yes they might be happier post operation. I know I was happier after braces, my teeth were all over the place before and it made me very embarrassed. I stopped smiling with teeth altogether. Something I had to relearn how to do afterwards. I’d imagine that it is possible that cosmetic procedures could make a person happier. But I don’t think it guaranteed.”*

*“it definitely could go either way. They could be much happier because they disliked their feature so much before that they wanted it to change, and the change would be welcome, but on the other hand to know they had to change themselves physically to conform can be quite a sad realisation and maybe they would even miss their unique feature.”*

### **Respondents who have never considered cosmetic procedures**

#### **Yes, they would be happier**

General comments which support the view that ‘friends’ with a feature that is not conventionally attractive might be happier following a cosmetic procedure include:

*“I would expect recipients of successful cosmetic procedures to ascribe positive events to the procedure and thus be happier.”*

### **Societal factors**

Like the group of respondents who had considered using cosmetic procedures, those who had *never* considered procedures also highlighted the role that society may play in whether their imagined friend or relative may be happier following a procedure. One respondent for example notes, broadly, that a procedure in these circumstances might “facilitate social relations.” Other comments which make similar points include:

*“Because some societal benefits are distributed according to beauty.”*

*“Society is wrongly obsessed with physical attributes. It pushes perceived accepted ‘norms’ on us and makes us feel inadequate as we are.”*

*“We live in a shallow society that values people based on appearance.”*

*“As a society we need to accept and love people for who they are, not what they look like. Everyone should be and feel valued for who they are.”*

*“It could lead to more positive interactions socially and professionally.”*

*“I am quite convinced that the majority of women is happier the more they resemble the western beauty ideals (cultivated by primarily the media).”*

### **Reactions of others**

Potential happiness following a procedure to address a feature which is not ‘conventionally attractive’ was felt, by a number of respondents, to be dependent on the reaction of other people.

*“If it were hideous and people judged or it affected self-esteem, all being well with the surgery you might see self-esteem improved.”*

*“Some noses are very disfiguring. People don’t see past them. People’s attitudes are different to people they find less appealing to look at which has an effect on the person.”*

*“As long as the outcome is perceived positive by the person, looking different (i.e. ‘better’) may well result in being happier, in particular if others recognise this person in a different, more positive way.”*

*“People love compliments, and looking good always brings compliments from others. It will make one more confident.”*

*“... life is probably easier in some respects if you’re conventionally attractive - people are generally a lot more amiable to you from what I can tell.”*

### **Improvements to self-esteem**

A number of respondents suggest that happiness in these circumstances might be achieved through improvements to self-esteem.

*“At the moment when they look in the mirror that is all that they see, and they are very sensitive to comments about it. If they were to have it cosmetically altered, then they wouldn’t be as conscious about it for those reasons. It would be different and take some getting used to, but ultimately would make them happier if they did it for themselves.”*

*“Some (not all) people I know who have body features that aren’t conventionally attractive suffer from lack of confidence that can make them unhappy.”*

*“I can imagine the immediate self-esteem boost and renewed confidence such a procedure would bring.”*

*“I know a lot of people do feel happier or more confident if they have something corrected that they themselves are not happy with.”*

*“... if his / her feature is actually a source of low self-esteem for him/her (e.g., because he / she does not feel to be appreciated in society), then I think that he / she will be happier after having undergone a cosmetic procedure. This would still hold true even if what should happen is a change in the norms of society.”*

One respondent draws from his / her partner’s experience of surgery to change the appearance of her breasts to highlight the difference that the procedure made.

*“My partner had extremely different sized breasts, they did not fit conventional bras as they were so different. She was ashamed, walked with a stoop and was unhappy. After plastic surgery she was able to buy comfortable bras, walk more upright. It was an extreme case, so halfway in terms of ‘corrective surgery of an anomaly’ and ‘cosmetic’ meaning merely appearance enhancing (as the asymmetry has a physical / debilitating effect also)”*

A further respondent also draws from his / her sister’s experience.

*“My sister has had breast reduction surgery on the NHS and clearly feels much less self-conscious and more socially comfortable than previously.”*

### **Improvements to mental health**

Respondents indicate a broad spectrum of effects on mental health which might result from undergoing a procedure on a feature that is not ‘conventionally attractive’. These effects range from anxiety, to general discomfort with appearance.

*“Potentially their level of anxiety about their appearance is sufficiently high to warrant intervention - but only after some thought or counselling to ascertain if this really is the case.”*

*“I don’t think someone should change their appearance just to appear ‘conventionally attractive’, but if it was causing them anxiety or distress then I think they would be happier.”*

*“some people need it because of their psychological insecurity.”*

*“if someone really feels uncomfortable because of such a feature, in fact, surgery might help.”*

*“If they were very bothered about the feature I think that a cosmetic procedure could make them happier, if only because it removes a feature which they negatively obsess”.*

*“some people do feel unhappy and anxious as a result of physical features they feel to be unattractive. It is difficult to believe that in no cases could any of this unhappiness be addressed by changing that physical feature, though I daresay many and probably most unhappiness of this kind is less simple to remove.”*



## **Empowering**

One respondent offered a free text response which suggested that undergoing a procedure in these circumstances might be 'empowering'.

*"I think both removal of the feature that they disliked and taking control of their own bodies would be empowering. It might not be optimum but I suspect that if they chose it (which I take to be part of the scenario although it isn't explicitly stated) then they would likely be happy with their decision."*

## **Obtaining 'normality'**

The prospect of obtaining 'normality' was also highlighted by one respondent.

*"it allows them the chance to be 'normal' or 'like everyone else'. Surely this is why they feel the need to get the treatment in the first place? This procedure allows them to be just that."*

## **No, they would not be happier**

Before exploring the reasons which respondents give for indicating that their imagined friend would not be happier, it should also be noted that some respondents indicate a general wariness of the role of cosmetic procedures and the aspiration to be 'conventionally attractive'.

*"Do we all want to be clones? How ridiculous. People can be beautiful no matter what they look like. If everyone ends up looking the same, no doubt the unusual features would come back into vogue."*

*"Why should being conventionally attractive be the ideal or goal?"*

*"Striving to meet conventional standards is a ridiculous and unfulfilling game."*

*"I think everyone has more than one feature which would be not regarded as conventionally attractive. I think it's more important for people to be happy with who they are, not what they look like."*

*"The drive for everyone to look 'conventionally attractive' is leading in my opinion to a race of clones. We need to examine our own attitudes rather than alter people surgically to fit some stereotypical idea of what is attractive or not."*

## **Short-term happiness**

A number of respondents suggest that, although happiness might result from undergoing a procedure to address a feature not understood to be 'conventionally attractive', this happiness would not be long-lasting.

*"If it becomes a huge issue for them then surgery may help but their insecurities could just focus on the part of the body they were unhappy with and after the cosmetic surgery they may still not be completely satisfied."*

*"Perhaps for a while but not long term. They would feel more vulnerable and focused on their bodies not their characters."*

*"They may notice other imperfections in their body, and be seeking surgery as a means to satisfaction. However, surgery can only change*

*your outward appearance and can never give lasting satisfaction, especially how societal standards to beauty are always changing.”*

*“I think they would perhaps be temporarily happier, but I don’t think that long-term happiness is connected to a person’s attractiveness or otherwise.”*

*“Adding false ‘attractiveness’ is a short-term fix for their own feelings of inadequacy, doomed to fail as and when new ideas of fashion and attractiveness are manufactured.”*

*“Social conventions can change, are they going to change their appearance with each social convention. They would be happier to realise their own worth and value outside of social conventions of attractiveness.”*

### **Slippery slope**

Respondents also raised concerns about the potential for a ‘slippery slope’ to further procedures or appearance concerns.

*“I have heard a young family member talk many times about how their nose is horrible and they would like surgery. However, they are a 16-year-old girl which has become so obsessed with her body image / looks on social media that she has become socially isolated so I’m not sure if she would even be 100% happier after surgery or whether it would start a snowball effect for wanting more.”*

*“I think it would create a slippery slope in that person to make further changes.”*

*“Whilst this comes down to the individual to determine how they would feel I imagine that having to undergo change to achieve a specific look may result in other insecurities and therefore may not achieve happiness as wished for.”*

*“If a cosmetic procedure is chosen because someone doesn’t feel very attractive, then it’s quite possible for the person to become more critical about their appearance, and their ageing looks. And I can imagine that a person could end up spending more money on unnecessary surgery and procedures, and becoming more insecure psychologically.”*

### **Happiness extends beyond appearance**

Some respondents suggest that happiness goes beyond appearance, and that therefore their imagined friend or relative would not be happier in the scenario posed.

*“I don’t think happiness depends on how you look.”*

*“Happiness is not based solely on your appearance. If they are happy with themselves in general, changing their looks will not make them more happy.”*

*“... a change in one’s appearance is not enough to make someone happier. A person who grew up with certain unconventional features might have developed behavioural / psychological reflexes that impact his or her levels of happiness in a much deeper way - our appearance ‘makes us someone’, and that doesn’t change automatically with a new appearance. What changes, however, are the reactions of others to this new appearance.”*

*“... cosmetic surgery doesn’t automatically make people happy”.*



*“Happiness comes from somewhere else than appearances and if you decide to conform to conventional beauty standards then where do you stop? I believe that happiness has nothing to do with looks and that self-criticism in that area is only ever a symptom of unhappiness that needs to be addressed at the core rather than treating symptoms.”*

Other respondents suggest that any happiness that is experienced in the circumstances outlined by the question would be that which is ‘superficial’.

*“It’s possible that they might feel a superficial happiness at not having the feature any more, but true happiness comes from within and can’t be changed by exterior modification.”*

One respondent notes the experience of his / her mother, which is portrayed as positive, but the respondent suggests that happiness might depend on other factors.

*“My mother has had some cosmetic surgery. I am certain she does not regret it and prefers her appearance post-op, I feel that without the surgery the issues that bothered her would contribute to a degree to unhappiness in her appearance. However, I am inclined to think that what constitutes happiness is largely dependent on other factors such as friendship, love, confidence etc.”*

### **Unhappiness is not appearance-related**

Some respondents suggest that any unhappiness for their imagined friend in these circumstances may not be due to appearance, but rather some other aspect of their personality.

*“It might be something in their personality which makes them unhappy.”*

*“If self-worth is based on physical attractiveness then there is a deeper problem.”*

*“If they were very unhappy with their appearance, perhaps surgery would lead to a positive result, but generally I find that feelings of happiness and satisfaction with oneself find their source deep down rather than solely in appearance. The facial or bodily feature of this person may be changed by surgery, but any unhappiness may still exist and flourish and may not in fact be alleviated by surgery.”*

### **The procedure will make no difference**

Some respondents indicated that the procedure would make ‘no difference’ to their friend’s or relative’s levels of happiness.

*“I may be wrong for some people, but on balance I think it will not improve people’s dissatisfaction with their body.”*

*“Even if had a procedure, would still not meet an impossible, imagined “perfection”.”*

*“They may feel better, but also they may feel worse depending on whether the changes change anything else in their life, such as relational dynamics, relational quality, functional utility (economic). I am inclined to think that relational quality and dynamics won’t change just like that in accordance with an aesthetic change, so the person will most likely still be unsatisfied.”*

*“A person’s insecurities go so much deeper than just their outward appearance”*

### **Concerns would shift elsewhere**

Comments were also received which suggest that a friend’s or relative’s concerns would shift elsewhere following a procedure to address a feature not considered to be ‘conventionally attractive’.

*“Think people are unhappy because of views, perceptions, etc.; those would remain after the procedure and they would still be unhappy, just about something else.”*

*“... they might take time to adjust to their new self, and I think they would still be unhappy with other parts of themselves. They would probably want to change more of their appearance.”*

### **Other approaches would have more success**

Respondents also suggest approaches other than cosmetic procedures to address the scenario set out in this question.

*“My experience is that surgery is not always the answer, and that psychological support can go a long way to addressing appearance concerns with or without surgery... I have experience of working with people who are able to assimilate their “difference” as part of their identity and focus on all aspects of themselves as a person, rather than just their appearance, to derive their self-esteem and self-worth, without needing to consider cosmetic procedures.”*

*“Happiness comes from how you view yourself, not how other people view you, and a cosmetic procedure is not the best way to address that (usually).”*

*“Possibly give confidence, but emotionally they will still default back to how people perceive them in terms of body image and the negative emotions they have attached to the said feature. I think better to at least first deal with the emotions attached.”*

*“I think a good self-esteem and enough fulfilling relationships in a person’s life can vaccinate well against these things or limit their personal impact to the extent that it’s negligible.”*

### **Something ‘else’ other than happy**

Some respondents felt that the outcome of a procedure in circumstances set out by the question would lead to other positive outcomes other than happiness.

*“Their life might be easier (depending on the feature) but happier? Probably not.”*

*“What does it change? Only a physical attribute. Not levels of happiness.”*

*“Not happier, perhaps more comfortable.”*

### **It depends on...**

Although most respondents ticked yes / no, their free text answers indicate that a large number of those who responded to this question think that their hypothetical friend's or relative's happiness 'depends' on a range of variables.

### ***The individual***

Several respondents felt that their answer would depend on the individual concerned.

*"it depends on the friend - including whether they themselves see their feature to be 'conventionally unattractive' and whether this matters to them".*

*"It depends totally on their overall body image, confidence and self-esteem, internal/external motivations for procedure and their expectations of what it would achieve..."*

*"I think it depends on how much that person is affected by their "non-attractive" facial or bodily feature. If they really hate it and feel miserable about it might make them happier to change it."*

*"It may improve their self-confidence, but not necessarily. Dependent on the person"*

*"Some people might not care whether they are "conventionally attractive" whereas to others it is very important. Some may be happier if they perceive that the procedure makes them more attractive: this might raise their confidence, especially if they are seeking companionship and believe it is their appearance that has been a barrier to that."*

*"It depends on the degree of which they're bothered about this feature. If it influences their life substantially they might be happier after it. If, instead, it only a matter of a small trait I don't think that changing it would affect their overall happiness."*

*"It would depend on the person and feature. People who are not conventionally 'attractive' but who radiate warmth and self-acceptance can be far more magnetic than people of unremarkable appearance."*

*"... it'd depend on the individual. Some people are comfortable with their appearance, warts and all, so a cosmetic procedure is unlikely to make them happier! In fact, it might make them less happy if they didn't look like "themselves" any more."*

*"... age is important. If it is an older person then I don't think they would be happier because changing your appearance late in life might feel like, and be perceived as, a change in personality. The way my friends and family look is very closely linked to who they are. It would be different if the procedure was to restore features that had been altered as a result of accident or disease."*

Drawing from their own experience, participants note:

*"The family member I have in mind doesn't give a stuff about her appearance, she is in her 70s, happily married, prides herself on other things."*

*"Depends on the person - I have a good friend with a facial feature that is not conventionally attractive but he has embraced it as part of himself and is confident."*

One respondent observes that even if an individual is satisfied, the effect on society might be negative as others who choose not to have a procedure might be 'damaged'.

*“It’s possible that a young woman with a wart on her nose that she feels blots her appearance if she had it removed she would feel more confident and happy and be treated more favourably in society and not bullied then her life may go better if she has surgery... but this doesn’t mean it’s a great idea for society and that by endorsing her surgery and agreeing her life will go better is very damaging other people’s opportunity to be accepted left intact.”*

### **Physical effects of the feature / body part**

Other respondents suggest that resulting happiness might depend on the feature / body part in question.

*“It depends on what it is. My daughter had a breast reduction because of the strain it put on her spine and the damage it did as a teenager. I do not consider this to be cosmetic, but essential surgery, although consider it to be cosmetic. She is certainly happier.”*

*“It depends on how much it affects their self-confidence and whether such a procedure would indeed help with boosting self-confidence or may only lead to further interventions to conform to what is considered conventionally attractive.”*

*“If you had an oversized wart on your face then yes have it removed. If a woman develops little or no breasts then yes have implants, but don’t do it on a whim.”*

### **If unhappiness ‘genuinely’ stems from the physical feature**

Respondents also suggest that happiness might be dependent on the fact that it is the physical feature itself which is causing distress. Some cast doubt on the view that physical features contribute to unhappiness, or whether other issues are at the root of unhappiness.

*“They might be happier if they are focusing excessively on that feature and obsessing about it. However, if they are living an unhappy life because of other circumstances, the cosmetic procedure isn’t going to do much in terms of changing these circumstances and making them happy.”*

*“Yes if they were unhappy because of the unattractive feature. No if the feature did not make them unhappy. No if their reason for unhappiness was not the feature.”*

*“Crucially, it depends on whether whatever is troubling them would actually be addressed by a cosmetic procedure; or whether there are deeper concerns that will remain afterwards. In many cases (a minor blemish) I think the answer would be no.”*

*“If they had been genuinely distressed by their supposedly unattractive feature, then eliminating the source of distress would probably make them happier. However, they may still be dissatisfied, or regret the procedure - two cases which are possibly more likely to occur in individuals who might get cosmetic surgery (that is, people who are sensitive to perceived cosmetic flaws).”*

*“Possibly, if what makes them unhappy is a physical feature.”*

*“I think it depends on whether it is truly the facial or bodily feature that is making them unhappy. (In which case my answer is yes). In some cases this won’t be the case, i.e. they’re unhappy because of social pressures to*

*look a certain way, or they're unhappy for completely unrelated reasons misidentifying the unhappiness with their looks. (In such cases my answer is no)."*

### **The feature / body part which is not 'conventionally attractive'**

A significant number of respondents suggest that happiness following a procedure could depend on a number of variables related to the feature / body part in question, including:

- **Visibility / prominence**

*"This is probably a matter of degree - how obvious the feature was and how much it bothered them. If it was having a significant impact on their life, then removing the feature might improve their self-confidence"*

*"I think an extreme case where something about someone's physical appearance is noticeably 'unattractive' could end up dominating someone's life."*

*"I'm talking about harelip or something really visible and relatively minor to fix. It's also like people who have horrible teeth cos their mom or dad was dentist phobic and never took the kid. They need a chance too. Will impact on confidence, job search and promotion, life opportunity. But NOT merely cosmetic stuff!"*

*"It really depends on how prominent it is - if we're talking small breasts, slightly overweight, no I don't think it will make them happier because these things are really more about how we feel about ourselves. If we're talking something that might be classed as a physical abnormality - a very large birthmark across the face, a benign but disfiguring tumour - then yes, because these are things that mark us as significantly different from others' points of view, not just our own."*

*"They \*might\* if they had some feature that is hard to miss and if it results in people constantly staring (and saying unpleasant things)."*

*"If it was disfiguring or impeding their activities, then I think it would make life much better. If they were constantly aware of it - say of a large mole - then I can understand having it removed. But it's not a yes or no question."*

- **Attractiveness / unattractiveness**

*"I think it would greatly depend on how unattractive it was."*

*"Depends on how 'unattractive'."*

- **Distance from the 'norm'**

*"It would depend upon how far from the norm the individual was; it might help, it might not."*

- **Function**

*"They might but it really depends on what. E.g., for cleft palate it's necessary for other reasons too."*

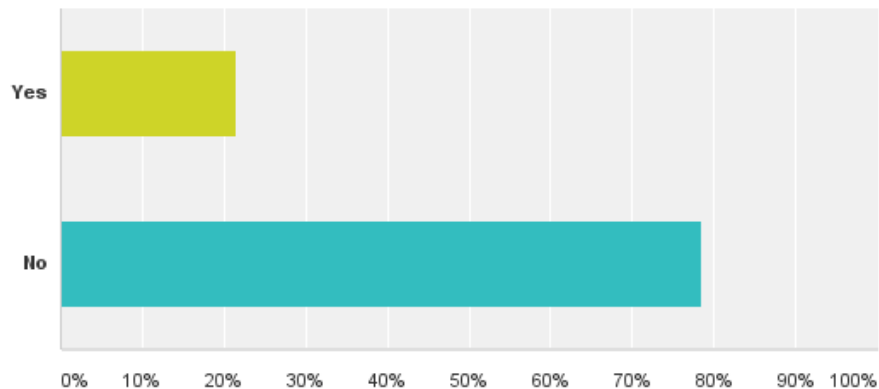
*"It depends on how severe it is and whether it causes discomfort or trouble breathing, etc."*

**Question 8:** (Visible to all respondents, regardless of response to Question 1)

***Imagine a good friend or relative has a facial or bodily feature that is not regarded as conventionally attractive.***

**Q8 If they chose to have a procedure, would it change your feelings about them?**

Answered: 343 Skipped: 105



**Please tell us why.**

Although not every respondent chose to use the free text box in order to explain their answer, a significant number did. These responses are summarised below and categorised in accordance with their answer to Question 1.

**Respondents who have undergone cosmetic procedures**

Most respondents in this category who chose to leave a free text response indicated that their feelings towards their good friend or family member would *not* change if they chose to have a procedure. However, a small number suggest that their feelings *would* change.

**Yes, feelings would change**

A small number of respondents who have received a cosmetic procedure suggest that feelings for friends / family members would change. A number of different reasons were offered.

- Considering their friend / family member to be 'shallow':  
*"I hate to say it but I would think they are a little shallow."*
- Concern for friend / family member:  
*"I would be more concerned about their unhappiness and insecurity."*
- Pity for friend / family member:



*“I would think they were insecure about their bodily appearance and think it was a shame they felt this way.”*

*“I would feel that they had changed from a person who had not had a cosmetic procedure to one who had. Whether my feelings would be normatively relevant in the way that is being implied, I don’t know. It would depend on what had been done, but I find it unlikely I would feel ill-will. Pity at worst, if I had considered it irrational in the first place or if the procedure had catastrophically failed. But ultimately I would not judge them poorly for the decision to have a procedure because I don’t find cosmetic procedures to be intrinsically morally problematic. And people are not rational.”*

Although some respondents indicate that specific feelings might change, as indicated above, some respondents list several potential manifestations of those changes:

*“I suppose that I would see them as more of a conformist, less confident - rather than a head-strong ‘who cares what other people think’, independent and intelligent character who didn’t give a monkeys for other people’s views about his/her unconventional feature.”*

*“I might think they were vain, I might feel sorry for them for not being happy with the thing concerned, I might be ambivalent.”*

One respondent suggests that whether feelings change might depend on the person who is the recipient of the procedure, and the type of procedure they undergo.”

*“My younger brother also had the same surgery [otoplasty] - it did not change how I felt about him. I know of several women that have breast implants and I view them more negatively (perhaps because of my own insecurities).”*

### **No, feelings would not change**

Among respondents who had undergone a cosmetic procedure, more free text responses indicate that feelings towards their friend / family member would *not* change. Although some respondents reply simply, “of course not!”, others provide a range of reasons for their response, which can be grouped accordingly:

#### ***It’s their decision / choice***

A number of respondents suggest that their feelings towards their friend / family member would not change because the choice to undergo a procedure is autonomous.

*“Totally their choice and I’d support them whatever they did.”*

*“Depending on their motivation behind having the procedure, if they truly felt happier afterward that’s their choice.”*

*“Because it’s a personal option to have a procedure, and it’s nothing to do with me.”*

*“Having a procedure is one’s own choice, it is their right to decide over their own body”*

*“People have the right to do whatever they want to do with their own bodies.”*

*“It is their choice and it wouldn’t change my feelings about them whatsoever.”*

### **Cosmetic procedures do not 'change' the person**

Other respondents suggest that their feelings towards their friend / family member would not change because the procedure would not 'change' them fundamentally, with several respondents stating simply that "they are the same person".

*"They are still the same person, its aesthetics, not a personality transplant."*

*"As long as they stay the same inside it won't make a difference - but I suppose if they start acting different it might change things."*

*"They are still the same person underneath."*

*"Not at all, they are still the same person (with or without the procedure)."*

*"Surgery or cosmetic procedure does not change who they are and in any case it is about how they feel not me."*

*"I like them on the inside."*

*"Physical features are not the primary basis for bonding with someone else."*

*"Because they're about more than how they look and I know that the intrinsic 'value' of a person is not based on appearance. Although I find it very difficult to apply this principle to myself."*

### **Others should not judge**

Some respondents suggest that their feelings would not change because they would not judge the person for their choice to undergo cosmetic procedures.

*"I cannot know how they feel so shouldn't judge."*

*"If a good friend or relative (i.e. someone you either like a lot or love) has a procedure and it makes YOU feel differently about them, then you're a bit of an arsehole aren't you?"*

*"I am not sure... if I cared for someone then I would support them and try to not judge."*

### **'I've done it'**

A small number of respondents refer explicitly to their own experience of using cosmetic procedures and note that, because of this experience, their feelings towards their friend / family member would not change.

*"I cannot judge them as I have done it."*

*"Because I've been there."*

*"I'd feel vindicated for my own decisions."*

### **Other reasons**

Several other reasons were also offered by individual respondents:

- *"I don't know how they're feeling inside and for some people, I feel cosmetic procedures are life-saving. Even when reasons are 'superficial', if it makes my friend happier, I'll support them."*
- *"I would support the decision that makes them happier."*

- *“It’s none of my business”*
- *“Don’t care.”*
- *“I don’t think it is anything to be ashamed of.”*
- *“I’d try and understand their point of view like I would with all my friends”*
- *“I do not consider cosmetic surgery simply a demonstration of vanity but rather a self-directed step toward self-improvement.”*

## **Respondents who are considering or have seriously considered cosmetic procedures**

For this category of respondents, fewer free text responses stated that feelings towards friends or family members *would* change than those which suggest that feelings would *not* change.

### **Yes, feelings would change**

Among free text responses which indicated that feelings towards friends and family members *would* change if they chose to have a cosmetic procedure, several highlighted perceptions of insecurity.

#### **Considering their friend / family member to be insecure**

*“It indicates they lived with feeling a deeper sense of being flawed than normal. Many people think about fixing something. Much fewer do it.”*

*“I would think them very unhappy, I think cosmetic procedures are an option only when one is extremely dissatisfied with their appearance. I would maybe be disappointed, feel like they were giving in to how everyone expected them to look, the norms of attractiveness. Which of course wouldn’t be fair”.*

*“I may think that they are quite weak and insecure inside and perhaps not have the depth of mind to think of the bigger picture and of the effect it may have on others.”*

Some respondents add that they would feel sad for their friend or family member.

*“I still love my friend who had a procedure done, but it made me so sad for him that he had to have it done, and that he hated himself so much beforehand. I wished he had never had to be bullied so badly and that he could learn to love himself without feeling he had to look good on Instagram etc.”*

*“I would be disappointed that they had succumbed to the pressure to look more conventional and would be sad that they considered cosmetic surgery would be the panacea that would change their life. It would not change my essential feeling about them though.”*

Another respondent states that their feelings towards the recipient might change positively:

*It is a rational decision and may dispose me (more) positively towards them through the admiration I will feel for their brave response and use of modern (cosmetic surgical) technology.”*

### **No, feelings would not change**

More respondents provided free text answers to support their view that their feelings towards their friend or family member would *not* change. A number of reasons are offered to support this view.

### **Friendships or family relationships remain the same**

*“A good friend is a good friend... regardless.”*

*“I would still like the person for who they were not what they looked like and the issue is not mine it would be their issue with how they see themselves.”*

*“Their feet, their shoes, their walk, their journey. Not my place to judge them. If they are my friend, they are my friend regardless of what they look like. Their happiness is what matters.”*

*“I haven’t based my relationship on them being “perfect”.”*

*“I’ve obviously been attracted to their personality if I’m friends with someone and although they may look more attractive to me I would still love them the same as before.”*

*“For this to change my feelings about them, it would mean that my feelings would be affected by their new appearance or that my feelings would be affected by their decision to change their appearance. The first is pretty absurd - My opinion of them is not going to be affected by their new appearance. The second is an argument about autonomy - I think they are capable of making that decision, and even if I personally disapprove of cosmetic surgery (I don’t) this would be only one small aspect of the person that I know (and like!).”*

*“I do not base friendships on appearance and I think that a cosmetic procedure would be approached the same as any other decisions my friends make - hopefully with consideration and I would be respectful of their decisions. I would hope they were doing it for the right reasons but my feelings would certainly not change.”*

A related comment was also raised:

*“I suspect it would have a larger impact on interactions with strangers or people that don’t already have a strong emotional bond.”*

### **The person remains the same**

Some respondents also stated that the person remains the same, and that therefore their feelings would not change.

*“Because they are still the same person.”*

*“No, it doesn’t reflect on the person they are.”*

*“No because they would remain the same person.”*

*“It wouldn’t change them as a person.”*

*“The person would remain the same inside, and I would respect their choices.”*

### **It is ‘their decision’**

Some respondents suggest that their feelings would not change because the decision to undergo cosmetic procedures is solely that of the user.

*"It's their decision alone."*

*"I would respect their bodily autonomy and decision to change themselves. I cannot judge how someone feels in their own body."*

*"Because it's their decision, I'd be worried if it was considered unnecessary to have surgery. But I definitely would be happy for them."*

*"If you understand what you're doing, who am I to trump your autonomy - within the limits of lawfulness. Perhaps good taste may feature somewhere in my head but then again, I like red wine and some of my friends like white wine. Taste is entirely subjective."*

*"It's their choice and we're not here to judge people's choices. As friends you are meant to support the person and be happy for them if they generally are a lot happier with their choice."*

### **'None of my business' / 'not for me to judge'**

Other respondents indicate that their feelings towards their friend would not change because 'it's none of my business'.

*"Personally, I do not make a judgement of those who have cosmetic procedures. Ultimately, unless the individual is being exploited, or is unwittingly putting their health at significant unnecessary risk, they have the right to make an autonomous decision about their body, and not to be judged or stigmatised for undergoing a procedure."*

*"It's not my business. They may do with their body and life as they please."*

*"It's their prerogative. It doesn't affect me personally."*

*"We should be careful about passing judgment in these cases. I think I would be supportive no matter what, even if I wouldn't do it myself."*

*"I would not feel in any place to judge their decision. Though I think adherence to conventional beauty norms harms us all, I do not think that this person should bear a huge burden on their own for going against them. After all, most of the rest of us are hardly going out of our way to change them either."*

*"It's their business."*

*"I can respect that it is their choice if they want to undergo a procedure."*

General expressions of 'understanding' why friends / family might choose to have a cosmetic procedure were also offered by a small number of respondents.

*"I understand it can be painful living in a world whereby people are judged by the way they look. This kind of culture can make people feel miserable and I think if it makes them happier then why not go for it."*

*"I'd be happy for them - if it was the sensible thing to do. If I didn't agree with the procedure, it would still not change my feelings about them as I believe in supporting those closest to me regardless. Additionally, the procedure could be for personal reasons that I perhaps would not be able to comprehend."*

### **Respondents who have never considered cosmetic procedures**

#### **Yes, feelings would change**



A number of respondents state that their feelings for their friend or family member *would* change, for a variety of reasons.

### **Feelings would change generally**

Respondents who suggest that their feelings might change generally appear to indicate that those changes would be negative.

*"I don't think I would like it. I love my close friends and relatives for who they are and cosmetic surgery would change an aspect of that person."*

*"like to think it wouldn't, but it probably would."*

*"... I would regard their decision to undergo cosmetic surgery as a bad one, and I would view them negatively as a result. They would be paying money in the pursuit of a physical solution to a psychological problem. That is wrongheaded and I would criticise them accordingly."*

*"... in the sense that it would reveal that we had very different values then I think my opinion would be changed in some way. I think that I would still try to be understanding and accepting though, and not judge them badly for it, even if I was surprised."*

*"I would think the worse of them for their naiveté in believing it would change the way they feel about themselves. But I don't know, maybe if their disfigurement was extreme, I could see their point."*

### **Feeling 'sad' for them**

Other respondents who have never considered using cosmetic procedures indicate that they would 'feel sad' for their friend or relative in this scenario.

*"I may understand their motivations but it would probably still make me feel very, very sad about state of society and pressure people feel under to 'conform' to certain beauty ideals and norms of appearance that don't reflect reality."*

*"I would personally feel sad for them, but then it is difficult to really know what the 'source' of their 'autonomy' is, so I would hope to just support them whatever happens."*

*"I would feel sad that they attributed so much weight on how they look."*

*"I am not so shallow as to judge friends for taking decisions that I do not agree with. I would however find it very sad that they felt a need to do this."*

One respondent draws on his / her own experience to indicate an experience of sadness for a user of cosmetic procedures.

*"Because it actually happened: a friend of mine recently told me she was seriously considering getting a nose job. This made me feel sad for her in a way I didn't before."*

### **Feeling 'disappointed' in them**

Some respondents indicate that they would feel disappointed in their friend or relative if they chose to use cosmetic procedures.

*"I would probably be a little disappointed in them for succumbing to pressure about their appearance rather than accepting themselves."*



*"I believe I might be a little disappointed to see it, but I would certainly hope to be tolerant and understand that person's perspective emphatically."*

*"I would be disappointed that they were so affected by social pressures."*

*"Would be disappointed - yet another person who has given in to the coercive pressure to always look young / perfect."*

### **Feeling worried or concerned about them**

Other respondents indicate that they would be worried about or concerned for their friend or relative.

*"I'd assume she were out of her senses and I'd be very concerned! I'd be very surprised if any of my close friends/relatives did something like this."*

*"... generally I would be worried that they had the wrong approach... Being unhappy about some cosmetic matter of appearance is often a sign of trying to obtain happiness externally or through external approval, but it is better and healthier to be happy from within."*

*"Only in terms of worrying about their lack of self-esteem. Knowing this will not help. Only act as a plaster for a bit."*

*"I would be concerned that they are not comfortable with their existing body and appearance, and I would want to try and talk to them to understand what they hope to achieve by it. I would be worried in case they were rushing into it"*

*"I would feel it was their choice but it would make me concerned as to why this was so important for them to do: I hope it would make me more sensitive to their concerns about their body."*

*"I would feel concerned as to their welfare, both in terms of the surgical risks but also the risk that they might not find the happiness they were seeking."*

### **Feeling that they are 'shallow' or vain**

Several respondents suggest that they would feel that their friend or relative was vain if they chose to use cosmetic procedures.

*"I would consider them vain and shallow. Fashions come and go and are manufactured falsely by media and society. True inner beauty comes from within."*

*"I actually might feel that they were quite a shallow person. It's one thing to make the best of your looks, but to go to the lengths of surgery/injections is a step too far."*

*"I would regard them as more interested in superficial beauty than the beauty of a person as a whole (character, personality)"*

*"I'd not have previously assumed they were so invested in their appearance, so I'd now worry more about what I said about looks."*

*"They would seem insecure / vain."*

*"I'd probably think they were too preoccupied by the superficial aspects of personality. But I'd also try not to be judgmental - I don't think having procedures of this kind is wrong in itself, and wouldn't know the person's own reasons for having it well enough to judge - and it probably wouldn't make much difference. If they had a whole series of surgeries, though, I'd*

*probably think they were some or all of foolish, shallow, or even mentally unwell.”*

*“It would probably make me feel that they are shallow - although this may be displaying my own prejudices.”*

### **Feeling shocked at their choice**

One respondent notes:

*“I would be shocked that they chose to do such a thing.”*

A further respondent draws on his / her own experience to express shock:

*“I had an Iranian friend who has a nose job to make her look more Western. This really shocked me - she was so beautiful before, and it made me realize how strong cultural perceptions of beauty and value are. It did also make me think that she was more vain and less confident than I had thought, but it didn’t change my fundamental feelings towards her.”*

### **Considering them to be weak**

A small number of respondents state that their friend’s or relative’s choice would make them feel that they were ‘weak’.

*“I would think they’re weak to do it.”*

*“Something wouldn’t sit right with me and it’d be in the back of my mind, but ultimately it’s their choice. Deep down, I think I might consider it to be a personality flaw/result of weakness on some level.”*

### **Considering them to be less intelligent**

One respondent suggests that their feelings would change in relation to their perception of their friend’s or relative’s intelligence.

*“I would regard them as less intelligent than I thought they were, deluded and mentally/emotionally unhealthy.”*

### **Feeling happier for them**

A small number of respondents indicate that they would feel happier for their friend or relative in this scenario.

*“I would in ways feel happier that they would be more confident in themselves after the procedure.”*

*“If they were happy about it I would be pleased for them, and vice versa.”*

One respondent notes his / her own experience to illustrate the happiness felt for a family member.

*“I felt happy for my sister that her life felt better”*

### **Changes in feelings depend on the circumstances**

More ambivalent responses stated that whether feelings would change depended on the specific circumstances of a friend or relative.

*“Would depend on the circumstance - people I know have had nose jobs that are hardly noticeable, but if one of my friends say went from being flat chested to having FF cup breasts I’d feel differently about their confidence levels and their understanding of what it is to be female.”*

*“It depends on whether the procedure was a vanity project or whether they had a genuine medical need for surgery.”*

*“It would depend what the procedure was for and what solution was chosen how my feelings would change. E.g. If a friend got breast cancer and then implants I would think nothing of it, but if she got massive enlargements after I would think her vapid, even though in both cases the procedure was part of the cancer treatment/recovery.”*

*“It depends on how significant the unattractive feature was - and what the reasons are for doing it. If someone feels they cannot live a normal life without this procedure, I would probably see it as a positive thing. Generally, I think it would be better if we all accepted the way we look and not attach too much importance to it.”*

### **No, feelings would not change**

A range of categories can be identified from respondents’ free text answers as to why their feelings towards their family members or friends would *not* change.

#### **General comments**

General comments to support the view that feelings would not change include:

*“I would prefer them not to but that would not change my feelings about them.”*

*“No, we live in a shallow appearance related world on one level, and we have to engage with that.”*

*“Difficult to say but I would say no. If they are happier in the end would be nice, but I would be so liberal to say that they can do whatever they want if it makes them happier. I do not have any negative judgements towards people who decide to go into these kind of surgeries.”*

*“I think it’s totally understandable why people and especially women go through these procedures (given the immense pressure we are placed under to make ourselves conventionally attractive). I certainly wouldn’t see it as a sign of personal weakness and vice. I wouldn’t view them as “shallow” (I think this just creates a double-bind that makes women’s position even more precarious; criticise the system, not the individual etc.). Merely a predictable response to very effectively maintained beauty norms under patriarchy & capitalism.”*

*“I do not feel so strongly against cosmetic procedures that using them would make me change my opinion about people. There are worse things people could do that would change my opinion of them (e.g., harm me or others).”*

#### **The friend / family member ‘remains the same’**

A number of respondents express the view that their friend or family member would 'remain the same' following a procedure, and that consequently their feelings towards them would not change.

*"I will definitely grow accustomed to whatever changes they have done physically as long as their characteristics do not change for the worse with it. I'd rather remain friends with a 34E cup friend with a humble, down-to-earth personality."*

*"Because I like them as a person not how they look."*

*"I have to accept them as they are, it is not easy to change fundamental options after 30 years old."*

*"They're still the same person!"*

*"What's inside won't change, no?"*

*"Because the person I'd like would still be there whatever they looked like. I imagine however that I'd feel a little jealous oddly."*

*"... it is cosmetic and therefore should not change their core value"*

*"If you love your friend or relative you love them for who they are, not for what they look like. Even if you disapprove of them having the procedure done you would go on loving the person."*

*"I like to think that my feelings towards friends/family is not based on their physical appearance, so I would like to believe that whatever they choose to do to their own bodies would not have an influence on my feelings towards them."*

### ***Friendships or family relationships remain the same***

Similarly, respondents observe that the *relationships* that they have with their friend or relative would remain the same following a procedure, and that therefore their feelings towards them would not change.

*"As they are already my friend or relative, I am very familiar with them, and actually character is more important to evaluate a person."*

*"They would still be my friend regardless of their appearance and I would be happy for them if they felt it was successful."*

*"If they are a good friend, then no, because a friend's self-directed actions don't change the nature of the friendship. As people we make good and bad decisions all the time, but friendships are based on more than one agreement on a topic."*

*"They are ultimately my friend. I would only change my feelings if their actions changed as a direct result of this."*

*"I honestly think that friendships should be independent of whether your friends decide to have a cosmetic procedure."*

*"I would hope that true friendship goes beyond appearance. If they were happier I hope I would be happy for them"*

### ***'None of my business' / 'not for me to judge'***

Other respondents suggest that their friend's or relative's decision is 'none of my business'.

*"That has happened and I didn't judge the person because I understand their reasons. It's a societal problem, I wouldn't blame the individual."*

*"Their choice, friends aren't to judge but to support."*

*"... it would be part of their freedom and basically none of my business."*

*"It's none of my business. If people want to spend their own money on surgery - who am I to question it?"*

*"I try not to judge others on what they decide to do with their own bodies as it does not affect me"*

*"... it's up to them to do what they feel they need to do. Whilst I might not agree with what they've done, who am I to judge?"*

### ***It's their decision / choice***

Another view offered by respondents notes that their feelings would not change because 'it's their choice'.

*"I think it's their choice, they have their own reasons, and I respect them. It wouldn't change my feelings about them at all."*

*"No, this would be their choice and I would respect that - it would not change who they are as a person."*

*"People can do what they want, wouldn't make me like them more or less."*

*"It is not for me to comment on their choice. This has nothing to do with my feeling for them."*

*"It is an individual's choice and I wouldn't think less of a friend who wanted to do that. However, I might encourage them to be sure they've understood all the information about the procedure and all possible outcomes."*

*"It's up to them not up to me, and that wouldn't change my thoughts and or feelings about them."*

*"... it is their choice. I would like for them not to feel that it mattered to have a 'conventionally unattractive' feature, but also appreciate that this is not necessarily how people feel about themselves or experience their lives."*

*"The decision to have cosmetic surgery is for them alone and I would not make any judgement about them on the basis of that decision."*

### ***Looks as 'unimportant'***

Respondents in this category also indicate that their feelings would not change because appearance is 'unimportant'.

*"Because looks are not important as loyalty and trust."*

*"I do not change my feelings of a person based on his / her looks."*

*"The personhood is more important to me than looks."*

*"My feelings are not based on their appearance or even in their own perception of themselves."*

### ***Friends / family should be supported***

Some respondents suggest that they would support a family member or friend who chose to use cosmetic procedures.

*"I think it's important to support friends and family, and this is what I would try to do in this situation."*

*"If they really wanted to do it I would still support them."*

*"If they are a good friend or relative then I would support whatever decision they make."*

*"It's completely personal choice. If that's really what they wanted to do then I would support them. That's regardless of whether it is something I would consider having done myself."*

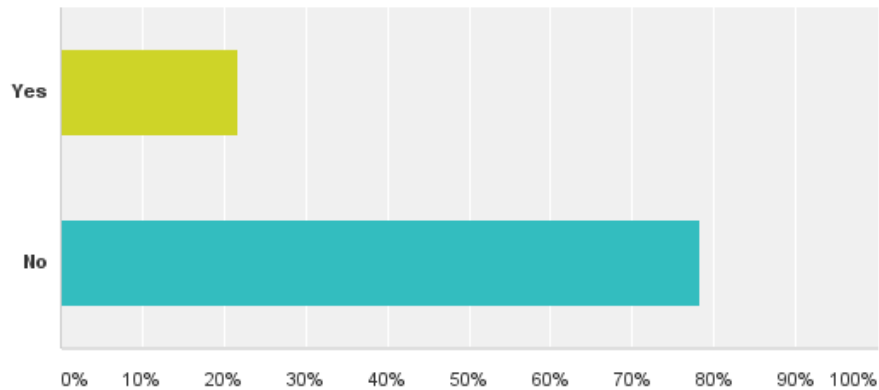
*"It's not my place to judge my friends. I would support them."*



## Question 9

### Q9 How about children? Should parents arrange for their child's appearance to be changed if it's unusual?

Answered: 319 Skipped: 129



Yes: 21.63% (n=69)  
No: 78.37% (n=250)

Please explain your answer.

A significant majority of respondents who chose to answer this question indicated that parents should *not* arrange for their child's appearance to be changed if it is unusual. However, within free text responses, a number of respondents move away from binary answers and suggest that their responses may depend on the individuals involved and the circumstances they are faced with. As one respondent states: "I would have marked that answer as "maybe" if that were an available choice, as there are certain circumstances where cosmetic procedures would be helpful."

#### Respondents who have undergone cosmetic procedures

##### Yes, parents should arrange for their child's appearance to be changed if it's unusual

Few respondents who had themselves undergone cosmetic procedures state unequivocally that parents *should* arrange for their child's appearance to be changed if it is 'unusual'. Some of these respondents refer to their personal experiences to support their response.

*"My niece, a beautiful 8-year-old with a small face and delicate features has ears that are missing cartilage, which made them stand at right angles to her face. She was starting to be teased at school. She had them pinned 2 weeks ago, and nobody has looked back."*

*"my mum encouraged me to have surgery and whilst I found it distressing at the time, it's a bit like having braces. Of course it does depend what the*

*procedure is, i.e. how extensive and how risky and whether child is able to express any opinion, if they are this should be most important.”*

*“My goofy teeth should have been dealt with when I was a child.”*

*“I had a tumour behind my eye which caused it to protrude. I was bullied all throughout my childhood from adults and children, people would stare at me. It caused me so much unhappiness and I had no confidence. I had this removed and corrective surgery when I was 15 and my only wish is that I could have had it younger.”*

*“I wish my parents had tried more - school bullies are mean!”*

Bullying is also referred to by other respondents in the abstract, rather than drawing from their own experience.

*“there is a lot of bullying in the world and it can be VERY harmful. Try to prevent it if you can.”*

*“Some things can be easily corrected. Children can be cruel. If the procedure can save the child from teasing, it may be worth it.”*

*“I feel if the child possesses an insecurity regarding their appearance, developed without parental nit picking then yes they should. A good example is pinning ears back, easily fixed and prevents a childhood of nicknaming at the very, very least.”*

Other respondents state that the effect an ‘unusual’ feature has on children (for example, contributing to their unhappiness) may warrant parents’ interventions.

*“Otoplasty maybe a case in point where it is purely a cosmetic issue but could be justified I think children are more sensitive to appearance than we appreciate and so I would answer that it depends on the degree of abnormality and what can be done.”*

*“Only in very extreme circumstances where the “abnormality” is really significantly affecting the child’s confidence.”*

*“I think if the child is unhappy and old enough to make the decision then it’s okay to support them in a procedure as long as it not going to make them ill or affect their health.”*

*“Children should not have cosmetic surgery except for medical purposes or unless it is for something that makes the child distressed such as child wants ears pinned back.”*

### **No, parents should not arrange for their child’s appearance to be changed if it’s unusual**

A small number of respondents draw on their own experiences to indicate that parents should not arrange for their child’s appearance to be changed.

*“My parents tried many, many times to change my appearance but with the benefit of hindsight, those operations and procedures were just superficial, it did not fundamentally change who I am.”*

Some respondents indicate that it must be the child’s decision to change their appearance, rather than their parents.

*“Let them decide.”*

*“It’s up to the child.”*

*“It should be an autonomous decision.”*

Other respondents in this category suggest that any cosmetic procedure should be delayed until the child reaches the age of majority.

*“I think parents and children with concerns should wait until the child is an adult and work on self-esteem during the interim period.”*

*“Unless a very significant ‘problem’ they should wait until the child is of an age they can rationally decide themselves.”*

*“They should leave it until they are 18 unless it’s cleft palate or from burns or something similar.”*

*“I think it’s up to the child to decide when old enough. But it is hard to give a complete blanket rule... If the child is being teased mercilessly for having really badly sticking out ears, easily corrected, it might be more understandable for having them sorted, rather having the child remember the possible miserable school bullying for the rest of his/her life.”*

One respondent also notes that children’s features may change as they grow.

*“Children grow and their features change. I think the parents need to wait until the child is showing signs of unhappiness with their appearance. And talk to them if they have.”*

Respondents also indicate wider views on parenting in response to this question, and some suggest that it is a ‘questionable’ parenting practice to arrange for a child’s ‘unusual’ appearance to be changed.

*“Parents should affirm a child’s self in entirety as special and loved.”*

*“Children should never be made to feel unattractive. As a parent one of the most important things you want them to feel is confidence in who they are.”*

*“... parents and society should educate their children in a culture of accepting the difference. Changes to appearances in children should be made only in cases of necessity of treatment or real abnormality in the aesthetics.”*

Other respondents were more trusting of the decisions that parents may take under such circumstances.

*“I think on the whole trust a parent’s judgement. No parent would want to put their child through pain or discomfort. I’ve known parents who have opted to have procedures to remove or lessen facial birth marks for example. Because they were advised that the procedure is more likely to be successful if it is done as a child rather than an adult. In that case I would trust a parent to make the best decision for their child. But I don’t think parents should arrange for their child to have a nose job for example.”*

### **It depends on...**

Even where respondents indicate a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer to this question, their free text responses suggest that their answer depends on a number of factors relating to the child.

### **The feature / procedure**

Variables relating to features / procedures was indicated in a number of responses.

*“If a child has had cancer and needs facial reconstruction, this is a totally different thing to a mole etc.”*

*“Unless they have serious disfigurement likely to cause stigma or suffering that can be best addressed in childhood. Otherwise this is a decision to be made when they are competent.”*

*“Not if it’s just mildly unusual, like a big nose that they might grow into. Yes, if it’s crooked teeth and dental braces. Yes, if it’s a hare lip or a facial deformity that might cause them misery. I think the majority of parents would never put their children through unnecessary cosmetic procedures. If the child’s appearance is unusual enough to put that child at a disadvantage in society, then yes.”*

*“Only if it something that impairs them (e.g. cleft palate) or if it embarrasses them (e.g. large port wine mark).”*

*“If a child has a condition that is physically debilitating and is better corrected when young such as hare lip or cleft palate then yes. Otherwise I feel the decision should be postponed until the child is capable of understanding the procedure and consequences unless there are likely to be severe psychological consequences and a medical opinion agrees with this.”*

*“If it has a detrimental effect on their health, yes. But no other reason.”*

*“If it is a disfigurement, the procedure is minor and does not cause complications or distress. More major procedures should be left until the child is old enough to take their own decisions.”*

*“... it’s fine to correct a cleft palette. But if it’s just a matter of taste, the parents should be trying to give the child confidence. It’s tricky isn’t it! Braces are acceptable but not nose jobs. People get their children’s ears pinned back. I don’t know! It’s not black and white.”*

### **The situation / circumstance**

Respondents also suggest that their answers may depend on the situation or circumstance in which the child and their parents find themselves.

*“Both, depending on situation. Would prefer it to be the choice of the child, once they are able to make that choice, wherever possible. However, understand the drive to protect by removing difference, and some conditions require doing this at a very young age when the child cannot choose for themselves.”*

*“This depends on the criticality and the effect it may have on the child growing up. I don’t think parents should have the right to do anything.”*

*“If a child’s appearance is simply unusual, probably not unless the child is distressed, e.g. as a result of bullying. Grossly sticking out ears are a case in point”*

### **The child**

Respondents who suggest that their answer might depend on the child in question refer to potential levels of distress and suffering for that particular child.

*“‘Unusual’ is not a good reason to change someone’s appearance, especially when it concerns children. However, if their child really (mentally) suffers from it, the parents can arrange it after extensive discussion with both the child and doctors, etc.”*

*“If the child is clearly distressed and undergoing a lot of personal and societal pressures, it could have negative affect on their development. However, if it is the parents’ own view then no.”*

*if their appearance is going to hinder their quality of life or their ability to do something, or if the child is suffering (vocal and unhappy about their ‘unusual appearance’ over a long period of time). However I would say that it is not the parents responsibility to change this unless it is clear that this will significantly hinder their quality of life.”*

## **Respondents who are considering or have seriously considered cosmetic procedures**

### **Yes, parents should arrange for their child’s appearance to be changed if it’s unusual**

A number of respondents indicate that parents should arrange for their child’s appearance to be changed if it is ‘unusual’ for a variety of reasons, as indicated below. Some draw on their own experiences. For example:

*“I had orthodontics when I was a child, and am happy I had access to it. Also very sticky out ears, I can fully understand why people have them pinned back. Children are bullied for these things and it can make your life hell.”*

Some respondents also chose to list procedures that they think parents should arrange for their child to undergo, particularly otoplasty, cleft lip or palate procedures, and orthodontic braces.

### **To avoid bullying**

Several responses highlighted that bullying might be determinative in their response to this question.

*“society is judgmental and children can be cruel”*

*“Unless their appearance might result in heavy scrutiny / bullying, it shouldn’t matter.”*

*“If possible before they get bullied at school.”*

*“... not the pursuit of the perfect child, but correcting some invalidating features could help children grow happier and less bullied.”*

*“children are more prone to teasing and bullying and don’t have the psychological maturity to deal with negative social interactions. Situations like a cleft palate or extra digits that are not surgically altered can profoundly alter the self-image especially as a child learns their place within a social structure.”*

*“I think children can be insensitive to those who they perceive as different - and bullying can do more damage on occasion than a low risk cosmetic procedure.”*

## **No, parents should not arrange for their child's appearance to be changed if it's unusual**

Some respondents draw from their own experience to support their negative response to this question. For example:

*"I was left to grow up with my nose, I'm not stunningly beautiful, the people who I've met and are very pretty are usually really very arrogant and shallow."*

### **Delay the procedure until the child is of the age of majority**

Several respondents indicated that cosmetic procedures should be delayed until the child is older and / or able to give consent.

*"Informed consent from the child, where possible, is infinitely preferable, and an attempt should be made to gain this. However due to the health risks of some procedures, I feel that, if not urgent, the individual must reach the age of informed consent for medical procedures before cosmetic surgery is carried out."*

*"Given the amount of changes that take place growing up, I suggest that the child should choose when they are an adult rather than have a decision forced upon them."*

*"No, self-love! Gotta teach the kid self-love! If, when the kid is 18 or older and then wants to have a procedure done, then fine, but never force that on a child."*

*"Children shouldn't be exposed to those procedures especially when they don't have the maturity to decide whether it's right for them."*

*"They can decide when they are of age, however if it is causing confidence issues or bullying and mocking then of course the parent should discuss it with the family and child."*

*"I would want to resist a parent changing a child's appearance merely because it was not a trend and think there should be legislation on this so that decisions are made very carefully and delayed when possible until the child is an adult who can decide for themselves."*

*"A child deserves to make that choice himself as an adult."*

*"That decision should really be for the child when it reaches its majority, but it's a difficult one, especially if by having the procedure it would prevent the child from being bullied."*

One respondent also suggests that the child may be happy with their 'unusual' feature.

*"It is not the parents' choice, the child may be happy with their hooked nose or hooded eyes and as such it would be their decision of what to do with their body."*

Another respondent takes the view that parents' role is to support their children rather than to judge the unusualness of their physical features.

*"... if your child is unhappy with their appearance you need to be a voice reassuring your child that they are a good and worthy person, not saying "well yes your nose is a bit hideous so let's just cut a bit of it off" in not so many words."*



## It depends on...

### **The feature / procedure**

Several respondents indicate that their answer depends on the feature in question, listing a number of features that might be acceptable, or unacceptable, for parents to arrange to modify.

*“Depends on how severe the issue is. Severe acne and scarring can cripple a teenager to live a normal and healthy life. But not for every little thing should they have surgery.”*

*“... it depends on what and why. I have friends whose children were born with an extra toe which would have made it difficult to buy well-fitting shoes, so it makes sense that the extra toe was removed.”*

*“Depends on the problem. Cleft lip / palette I would agree. And some disfiguring things that interfere with life-huge birthmarks possibly, burns, other rare and uncomfortable conditions. But pinning ears back and more trivial things I would probably disagree with”*

*“... if the child had a cleft lip then by all means the parents should proceed with wanting to realign their face however, if the parent wants to get a nose job for cosmetic reasons then no I don't think that is acceptable.”*

*“if they look unusual - no. But I could empathise with changing the appearance of a child for a specific reason - i.e. a large facial birthmark or burn scar, if the child was at an age where they had input/initiated this conversation.”*

*“I had laser on my upper lip starting in middle school, and I am so thankful my parents allowed that to happen because I had a literal moustache growing on my lip (which is not ideal for a girl).”*

*“Having a cleft, I personally was never pushed by my parents to change my appearance and was only guided by what my own feelings were. If a child is genuinely unhappy and feel changing it would be beneficial then parents should. However, if a child's difference does not bother them and they are happy then no, don't change it.”*

### **The situation / circumstance**

Other respondents stated that their answer to this question depended on the child's particular situation.

*“Only if it represents a significant social impairment, otherwise they should wait until they can take an adult decision”*

*“If, for example, a child has unwanted facial hair that is deeply upsetting her, then I think it is ok for parents to find as harmless a way as possible to change this for her, maybe even just temporarily. But for more invasive, potentially very harmful and irreversible procedures, I guess I would encourage parents to try to find another solution.”*

*“If it were simply a matter of aesthetics then definitely not. It would potentially be very harmful for parents to make life altering decisions about their children's bodies.”*

*“... it depends on the situation. I child with a hair lip I think should be able to have that repaired. If the deformity affects health, then, yes fix it. Otherwise I think I would say, no leave the child's unusual appearance until the child themselves can be involved in the decision process.”*

## Respondents who have never considered cosmetic procedures

### Yes, parents should arrange for their child's appearance to be changed if it's unusual

Again, although respondents who had never considered undergoing a cosmetic procedure ticked 'yes' in response to this question, few free text responses indicated that their answer was unequivocal. Those who did answer unequivocally include:

#### **To avoid bullying**

*"the parents should show unconditional love but school is a tough and terrible place of you have a deformity or something out of place."*

*"Children are incredibly cruel. Looking 'weird' is likely to lead to bullying in school from a young age, and this can cause significant and enduring self-image problems."*

*"I think children can be really mean to peers that look unusual. So I can understand that parents do this to protect their child."*

A further nuanced approach was also put forward by one respondent.

*"Obviously the idea of a child being bullied for their appearance isn't nice, but I'd be concerned that changing a child's appearance might give impression that they are the problem."*

#### **Making life easier / different / happier for the child**

Several respondents indicated that their answer was influenced by considering whether life could be made easier, different, or happier for a child.

*"If it makes the child's life easier and reduces the risk of psychological damage"*

*"If an aspect of their appearance was an obstacle to happiness then addressing it may be appropriate."*

*"If a child's appearance is 'unusual' beyond not being conventionally attractive, I think their parents would be entitled to have it changed in order to give them a better chance of being accepted by their peers"*

*"Yes, IF the child is unhappy her/himself about the aspect of their appearance in question."*

*"If... a child has a major abnormality that affects how others dealt with them and was causing the child to withdraw and not engage with school, friends, others, then I can see that there would be a strong case for a parent to arrange for the child's appearance to be changed."*

*"it is very aesthetically unappealing, or causes severe unhappiness, then there should be an intervention"*

*"... considering the extent of the pain that might be inflicted to people who don't correspond to 'normal' beauty standards, it seems to me like 'big' defects in one's children's appearance should be fixed - but only if it isn't risky for the kid's health and only if it is meant as a way to fix, rather than enhance, certain features. This is part of giving one's children equal opportunity in life."*

## No, parents should not arrange for their child's appearance to be changed if it's unusual

A significant number of respondents who have never considered having a cosmetic procedure indicated that parents should *not* arrange for their child's appearance to be changed if it is unusual, for a range of reasons categorised below. However, some respondents indicated unequivocally that parents should not arrange for their child's appearance to be changed:

*"Categorically no. This is unacceptable in every way. What kind of message does this send to the child? That they are not good enough? Let the child decide for themselves when they are over consenting age."*

*"No, it encourages superficiality in children, may affect their feelings of self-worth, and with non-necessary procedures such as this, the patient should make an informed decision. Children cannot make informed decisions about surgery."*

*"Please no! The children are who they are, they shouldn't be changed, if their bodies are considered by society as unusual in a bad way, then society should change!"*

*"No. Children aren't in a position to make that kind of choice and the reasons for the parent doing it - fear of the child being ostracized or bullied - are poor. If anything, we should be trying to create a society where people are accepted for what they look like. Trying to alter children to make them fit some sort of ideal or norm is deeply counterproductive to this and sends the message to their child that appearances and being 'normal' are all that matters."*

*"Good grief, no. It's more of the regression to the lowest common denominator parenting."*

*"Absolutely not. Such actions should rightfully constitute child abuse."*

*"Sounds absolutely horrific and unnatural and should be illegal."*

*"... in general, I think that looking unusual is not a sufficient reason for medical operations for children. Looking unusual is not inherently a bad thing, and parents making this decision also seems to violate the child's own agency."*

*"Children should never have unnecessary surgery performed on them, and even more so for a stupid reason."*

### **Drawing from personal experience**

A small number of respondents also draw on their own experience to support their negative response.

*"When I was a kid I had a mole removed as it was on my waist line and kept getting caught. Whilst at the hospital I was asked if I'd like my ears pinned back at the same time (obvious following a conversation with my folks) This being the first time I hear about this I said no. My mum said but you get bullied at school because of it and I said no they are my ears. One is still a little bigger than the other but that's just who I am."*

*"Some children can grow up to look completely different, something that I personally feel happened to me. I believe people should wait until they are a lot older before they start making those decisions and it definitely shouldn't be a parent's choice."*

### **Wait until the young person can consent / age of majority**

Some respondents indicate that the procedures in question should be delayed until the point at which the child is older and / or able to give consent.

*“If possible I think you should wait until the child is old enough to decide for themselves. However, it would depend how badly it was affecting their everyday life.”*

*“That is up to the children themselves to decide, once they are grown up.”*

*“Children are not yet developed into individuals and don’t have a sense of what is morally and ethically right for them; they should therefore not be subjected to procedures that meet their parents’ standards, which may well not be their own when they grow up.”*

*“If it is not a massive defect (e.g., a malformation children were born with and that affects their health and/or elicits strong negative reactions from others), I do not think the decision to have cosmetic procedures should be the parents’. The child should be allowed to make a decision about it themselves once they are 18 years old.”*

*“I think the decision should be left to the child once they reach adulthood. This is because a) the child hasn’t finished developing yet so you don’t know how the unusual feature will develop as they age and b) the child may not be concerned by its appearance so in telling them that they need to change their appearance, the parent may be giving them self-esteem/body-confidence issues.”*

*“The child can make that decision in adulthood unless it’s a medical reason / condition.”*

*“A child will become an adult and then can make their own decisions later in life.”*

*“Children should wait until they are able to decide about this themselves.”*

*“It should be the child’s choice once they are cognitively mature enough to perceive and reflect on how their appearance affects them.”*

Similarly, other respondents highlight notions of autonomy to support their view that any procedures should be delayed until the child is of an age to make their own decision.

*“I think that this should be a decision for the child to make once they are old enough to understand the implications. It is a huge violation of a child’s autonomy and right to self-determination to impose such a procedure on them without their informed consent”*

*“Permanently changing the way someone looks should only ever be done if it’s what the person wants, not if it’s because someone else wants it for them.”*

*“Parents should allow a child autonomy over their own body.”*

Some respondents also suggest that unless parents wait, their actions could be deemed child abuse.

*“The children should be able to make the decision for themselves. Imposing an operation on a baby or young child unable to make an informed decision is a form of child abuse. The surgeon should be the child’s advocate and not just do what parents demand.”*

*“This strikes me as quite obviously falling into the category of child abuse. Having your children sliced up to make their appearance socially acceptable is just viscerally abhorrent to me.”*

### **Reasons of variety**

Respondents also suggest that children’s unusual appearance should not be changed because of the appeal of variety of appearance.

*“It would be boring if we all looked similar.”*

*“Encouraging children to change their appearance perpetuates a culture of perfectionism which is particularly damaging to children who are more susceptible to social pressures.”*

*“Unless it was life-threatening. I think what makes us look unique and endearing or stunning or eye-catching are slight imperfections.”*

*“That a child’s appearance is ‘unusual’ is no reason to call for a change. This would result in a homogenous and repressive culture, in which conventional norms stifle difference. It also puts pressure and stigma on those who do not wish to conform.”*

*“We want to live in a society where we accept the diversity of how people look, and judge people on their values and behaviour. I can imagine it’s tough for parents who will say they want their child to be happy - given that the reality is people do judge. But I think more could be done to change attitudes.”*

*“Streamlining and conformity is not a value children should be taught.”*

*“... we should embrace quirks instead of conforming to a ridiculous societal norm of what is accepted”*

*“It might turn out that a pronounced physical attribute might be of value to the young person in later life, e.g. make them distinctive for acting work.”*

### **Children should be encouraged to accept their appearance**

Respondents also suggest that children should be encouraged by their parents to accept their appearance.

*“Children should be taught to love themselves and each other for who they are.”*

*“Children should be shown that they are loved unconditionally, as just what they are.”*

*“Children should be loved as they are and not forced to conform. They should learn to love themselves regardless of looks by being loved regardless of looks.”*

### **Conveys negative values to children**

Several respondents noted that endorsing parents being able to change their child’s ‘unusual’ appearance conveyed negative values to children.

*“This encourages children to believe in superficial beauty rather than beauty of a whole (character etc.)”*

*“Teaching children that their appearance is the most important thing is incredibly damaging - we should be teaching our children that everyone is*



*different and that we can celebrate that. We also should be ensuring that children understand that it's what's inside that is the most important thing."*

*"This gives out the wrong signal. You are telling your child that they have to look a certain way to be accepted in society."*

*"I think this tells children that attractiveness is of higher value than character and social conventions around attractiveness are appropriate, which they often aren't."*

*"It seems intuitively wrong to force a child to undergo any kind of unnecessary cosmetic procedure - it might instil in them certain beliefs about the value of appearance, impact their self-belief etc."*

*"A loving parent will love a child whatever their appearance, but want to protect them from the harsh world out there. the problem about 'arranging' for the appearance to change is that it says to the child "you are wrong and need fixing" rather than "society is wrong"."*

Respondents also suggest that parents should focus on other values *other* than appearance.

*"Parents need to instil a sense of self-worth in their children, not berate them. Look at children with major deformities who are raised with love and support."*

*"Better to teach them about the diversity of life and people. Talking about cosmetic surgery enforces a body norm and encourages a lack of body confidence."*

*"Parents should encourage their children to love themselves and teach them that it's OK to be 'different'."*

*"I would let the child know that they are loved as they are and do not need to change their outward appearance."*

### ***The child may not be as concerned about the feature as their parents***

One respondent notes that although parents might be concerned about a particular feature, the child may not.

*"... the child may not be bothered about the feature and if the parents are telling them that it needs to be changed I worry that it could give the child self-esteem/ body confidence issues."*

### ***Children continue to develop***

Respondents also suggest that parents should not arrange for their child's unusual appearance to be changed through cosmetic procedures because children have not yet developed into their adult physical state.

*"Children often look slightly strange anyway because they're still growing into their bodies, and interrupting that process isn't necessary because you won't even know "how the story ends" if you will."*

*"the child hasn't finished developing yet so you don't know how the 'unusual' feature will develop as they age"*

*"Children's faces change"*

*"Many childhood abnormalities are gone by adulthood unless it is impeding their ability to grow or flourish there is no need to alter a child cosmetically. It should be their decision when 18."*



## It depends on...

However, again, many more respondents suggest that their answer depended on a range of factors.

### **The definition of 'unusual'**

*"Depends on what you term "unusual". If it is something both appearance-related but might also pose a physical handicap, then yes, otherwise no."*

*"If it is a huge wart on the up of her nose, sure."*

*"It depends what kind of 'unusual'. If the child is suffering socially/at school. I would not have issues to an operation to fix a squint for example. They should not mutilate their identity - e.g. I don't think they should Westernise the eyes."*

*"If unusual means outside of currently defined standard of beauty, no. If by unusual you mean a condition which severely affects the child ability to socialize and be happy, I would consider. It would also depend greatly on the invasiveness of the procedure"*

*"I am not sure of your definition of unusual (I quite like unusual) but I would wait till they were old enough to be involved in the decision."*

*"It depends upon what you mean by unusual (i.e. about how far from the norm the person is)? If the child is deeply unhappy, being bullied or teased or whatever, then this may be acceptable. But I don't think otherwise."*

### **The degree of suffering / distress**

*"If the child severely suffers physically or psychologically, then parents should arrange such a procedure, because then the child would not suffer anymore."*

*"Cosmetic surgery on anyone under the age of 18 should be considered only if it is life-threatening or emotionally distressing for the child."*

*"No, except in cases where the disfigurement is likely to cause a lot of (socially or physically) distress and the procedure simple (i.e. cleft palate) Otherwise, the child can decide when they are an appropriate age to do so."*

### **Bullying**

*"Unless it's causing significant problems for the child - i.e. they're encountering significant prejudice/bullying that's having a serious negative impact on their life."*

*"... it is possible that in the case of extremely unusual appearances, the child would face serious harms throughout their life - bullying or disadvantage etc. While there might be no moral justification for that bullying / disadvantage, avoiding it might be morally justifiable."*

*"I can see the dilemma - do you let your child suffer through teasing / bullying at school so they can make their own decision about the permanent alteration later. Or do you take the 'easy option' and just have them changed - thereby teaching them that to go with the crowd is the only way to the extent that you have to change your appearance if others don't like it?"*

*“It’s not a yes or no, children can be very cruel and when you’re young you just want to fit in, I don’t agree with boob enhancements for girls, but if it removes a scar or corrects something which makes life easier, then it’s an investment in that person’s future.”*

### **The procedure / feature**

*“This depends on circumstance. If a child has a cleft palette and this is done for more than just about surface beauty then it should be.”*

*“If it’s something major that may cause them future problems like a cleft lip or something then yes I think it’s good to arrange it. Also if it will cause them major embarrassment or anxiety in the future then possibly.”*

*“... it depends what it is and how severe. If it’s something like a cleft palate operation, I think that’s fine.”*

*“only if it’s something that approaches what might be considered disfiguring, and then only after counselling and discussion with the child.”*

### **Approaches to ‘unusual features’**

#### **No tick box**

Some respondents did not indicate their answer to this question in the tick boxes provided, and instead suggested in free text responses that they were unable to provide a firm answer. For example:

*“I don’t think you can say yes or no to this question. I feel this is a very difficult issues with lots of ethical questions attached. I think that these decisions are complex and should involve the support of a multi-disciplinary team, including clinical psychologists, who are able to help the parents to consider what would be in the best interests of the child, including consideration of the child’s rights and their rights as a future adult (e.g. does a decision now limit their opportunities to make their own or different decisions in the future). I think that where possible children should play a part in this decision making, and their views and understanding should be sought.”*

*“I just can’t answer this[...] I know parents generally want what is best for their children and I know some surgeries may feel like life will go better for child if they have surgery but ultimately I want to be working towards acceptance and compassion and tolerance of the given which is why I think all surgeries should be prohibited to take pressure off parents having to make decisions.”*

*“You need a “maybe” box in your questionnaire! If the parent thinks that the child will be disadvantaged by the abnormality - and the risk of the procedure is taken into consideration - then maybe!”*

### **Other comments [all groups]**

Across all groups of respondents, other comments were offered which did not address the question directly. These comments can be categorised broadly into three sections.

#### **Embracing diversity and difference**

*“Difference should be encouraged and accepted, and parents should try to have that attitude.”*

*“Within limits, diversity and unusualness in appearance should be embraced rather than removed.”*

*“We need a world and culture less concerned with outer appearance and more attentive to beauty of character.”*

### **Approaches to ‘unusual features’**

Some respondents suggest that, instead of addressing the physical feature, other approaches should be adopted.

*“It would be far healthier if images showing a greater diversity of physical features was an everyday occurrence to help ‘normalise’ our distorted / media-manipulated view and to accept ourselves and others, as we are.”*

*“We shouldn’t impose societal norms of beauty on children.”*

*“I think we are sending out the wrong messages to society when we pander to this type of procedure. It will only result in deeper unhappiness for people that cannot be made ‘normal’. Surely we should be working towards a wider acceptance of what constitutes a ‘normal appearance’ and not making the parameters narrower.”*

*“One should love one’s children as they are, not in some idealised form to be attained through surgery. But clearly “as they are” requires considerable analysis, and in practice the boundary between full facial reconstruction to look like Audrey Hepburn and removal of a skin tag is a matter of judgement.”*

### **Resilience**

The question of encouraging resilience in children who have an unusual appearance was also raised by a small number of respondents.

*“This is tricky on the one hand you want the child to be happy, but in all instances surgery is not always viable. Also you need to equip the child with the necessary life skills to cope with having an unusual appearance.”*

*“Children are cruel, but having a feature which is unusual can really help to develop your personality and ways of dealing with life’s struggles”*

*“The other approach might be to teach the child to deal with negative reactions”*

*“I think children should learn to love themselves and then as they get older make the decisions what they do or do not want for themselves. I think if you start by saying ‘you’re flawed’ then a child would develop that inferiority complex. What we should do is make children more tolerant of each other.”*

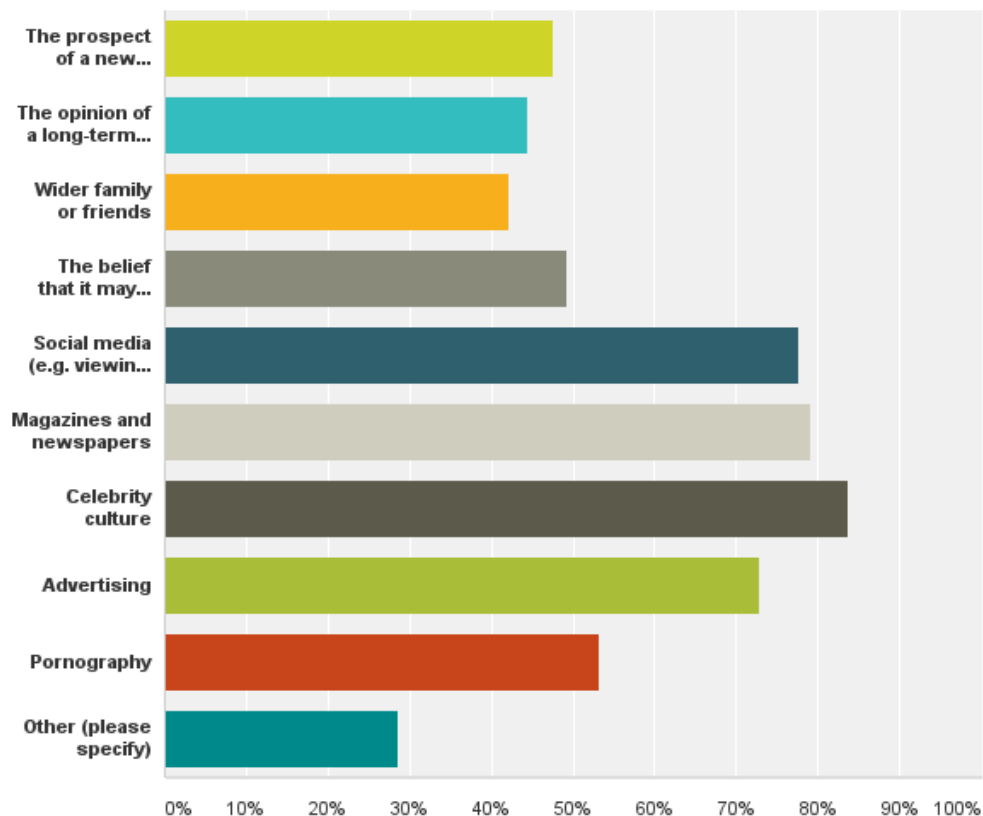
*“If it stops your child from getting bullied then I guess I can see the motivation, but I think there are better solutions (e.g. instilling confidence in your child, and helping them not to judge their self-worth on their appearance). If a parent changes their child’s appearance then it sends the message that there is something wrong with the child, which I think is a shame.”*

## Attitudes to cosmetic procedures – influences and regulation

### Question 10

**Q10 What / who do you think influences people's attitudes to cosmetic procedures? (Tick as many as you think apply.)**

Answered: 349 Skipped: 99



The prospect of a new relationship:	47.56% (n=166)
The opinion of a long-term partner:	44.41% (n=155)
Wider family or friends:	42.12% (n=147)
The belief that it may affect job prospects:	49.28% (n=172)
Social media (e.g. viewing or posting edited photos):	77.65% (n=271)
Magazines and newspapers:	79.08% (n=276)
Celebrity culture:	83.67% (n=292)
Advertising:	72.78% (n=254)
Pornography:	53.30% (n=186)
Other (please specify)	28.65% (n=100)

Relatively few respondents gave free text responses to this question, choosing instead to use solely the tick-box function. The responses of individuals who did provide free text responses are summarised below; however, due to the low free-text response rate, few overarching conclusions can be drawn.

## Respondents who have undergone cosmetic procedures

### **External influence**

Several factors which might fit broadly under the umbrella of 'external influence' were identified by respondents in this group.

#### *Societal influence*

*"The testimonies of celebrities who seem to show how it changed their lives, and how easy it was to do it, possibly many times over."*

*"Cosmetic industry has a lot to answer for: promoting instant happy results!"*

*"Societal norms. Rhinoplasty done to 'refine' shape of nose to that of Western culture."*

#### *Unrealistic beauty standards*

*"Unrealistic attitudes towards beauty. Social media does not help this as people are constantly comparing themselves to others."*

*"Mostly because of false standard of what one should look like. From ads, celebrities, models, porn, all too unrealistic and plastic. Much less because of feeling unattractive and unconfident."*

#### *Third party influence*

*"Family and partners may be very unsupportive."*

*"Peer pressure"*

*As teenagers we are much more prone to aspects of peer pressure etc. and other things like bullying when make us have a skewed view of what appearance should be."*

*"Medical professionals' attitudes and advice."*

*"People in their surroundings that may bully / insult them regarding their appearance."*

### **'Doing it for oneself'**

In addition, respondents also highlighted how cosmetic procedures may be undertaken 'for oneself'.

*"You do it for yourself."*

*"To please themselves. We look after our health and appearance for our own benefit not just for others or due to societal pressures."*

*"How they feel about themselves. The messaging you get feeds into our own thoughts about ourselves. There are lots of positive messages if you look for them. Or I choose to ignore the negative ones! We need to take responsibility and not keep blaming and oversimplifying something that is actually quite complex."*

*"None of that - do it for yourself"*

*"I'm sure many of these things play a role, but above all of them is the desire to feel happy with one's own appearance."*

## Respondents who are considering or have seriously considered cosmetic procedures

### **Cosmetic procedures as 'commonplace'**

*"Ubiquity of people who've had something done."*

*"Availability and price. Some will have a procedure simply because it's attainable."*

### **External influence**

#### *Cultural / media influence*

*"I certainly feel that the media has an enormous influence, which is possibly the strongest."*

*"Dominant patriarchal culture - still, and the subtle yet powerful effect it has on women, often at levels they are not conscious of."*

*"People today are so focused on celebrities, general ad models aren't really relevant anymore."*

*"TV programmes like 'Body Shockers' have a lot to answer for."*

However, one respondent indicates that influence does not lie with media, but with a general response to attractive people:

*"I think people love to easily blame magazines and media for influencing people's minds about cosmetic surgery but I believe it is because of the harsh reality of everyday life and the people you meet. When I was younger I didn't want a better looking face because I saw magazines of good looking people, I wanted it because I saw the way people reacted to good looking people and it still does happen."*

#### *Societal influence*

Societal influence was also noted in other forms by respondents. For example:

*"Feelings of inadequacy and abnormality based upon societal norms and sexual attractiveness."*

#### *Third party influence*

*"Peer pressure, thinking you will look like a certain celebrity afterward, be more attractive to potential boyfriends/ Lovers, praise and admiration to bolster the ego."*

### **'Doing it for oneself'**

A number of respondents suggest that some people may have cosmetic procedures 'for themselves'.

*"There is a gut feeling about being "complete" or sufficient. Of course this is being influenced by all the environment in youth, but then it is a fact. If technology allows, why not make people feel good? A pity that there is no way to escape aging yet!"*

*"The personal dream of being different and perfect"*

*"How they feel about themselves."*



*"I think one's view of one self is a massive influence, and how it affects your life"*

## **Respondents who have never considered cosmetic procedures**

### **External influence**

#### *Cultural / media influence*

*"Power of social media, celebrities, selfie posting is a new and huge force."*

*"Reality TV (e.g. on cosmetic surgery or top model competitions, biggest loser etc.)"*

*"The fashion industry"*

*"Glossy magazines full of photo shopped pictures of beautiful models. Films."*

*"So many children I work with have very distorted view of what bodies look like naturally due to media/ porn etc."*

One respondent also highlights how the dating industry might influence people's attitudes to cosmetic procedures.

*"It is worth pointing out that dating websites - a lot of us now depend on them - tend to require a photo, as though it is the first thing you are judged on. I find this so uncomfortable I've been reluctant to continue online dating. I suspect that peer pressure encourages people to go for surgery - there are groups of women where everyone else did it."*

#### *Gender*

*"The importance of women's appearance starts from day one. Girls dressed up in pink and pretty dresses who are told how pretty they look. Girls are told from when they are babies that their value comes from how they look, not who they are. This is definitely less so for boys, however increasingly this is also changing."*

*"Prevailing attitudes and much larger beauty discourse, especially concerning women"*

#### *Seeking the 'ideal appearance'*

*"Ideal appearance created by society"*

*"I think insofar as social conventions/norms are set about the importance of attractiveness and what counts as attractive, then this is largely driven by people's perceptions of what may affect their job or partner prospects"*

#### *Availability of cosmetic procedures*

*"Advertising and the availability of cosmetic procedures"*

*"It seems to be more mainstream and the prices do appear to have become more affordable."*

#### *Third party influence*

*"A controlling or abusive partner. We once treated a lady from the Middle East whose husband disliked the shape of her nostrils and who forced her"*

*to have a surgical procedure, including general anaesthetic, to change them. There was no real observable difference after the surgery.”*

*“Peers that bully people for aspects of their appearance”*

*“Attitudes towards the salience of appearance, likely derived from early experiences, family beliefs.”*

*“Being bullied and picked on and stared at.”*

*“Close family who comment on your appearance”*

*“Insecurity, bullying at school or in the workplace”*

*“I think people’s attitudes are often affected by people they work with or see during the day even if they don’t know those people -- e.g. other people at their place of work whom they might not know, but they imagine those people’s reactions to them.”*

*“I would be comparing myself to society’s norms in general and the people whom I know well in particular. And if I felt there was a big abnormality I would probably seek advice”*

### **The cosmetic procedures industry**

*“I think the cosmetic surgery INDUSTRY has to take some responsibility for changing social norms. This is a business. The more people who want your business, the more profit for you. This is not a set of disinterested, responsive, caring, kind doctors.”*

*“Corporations who benefit from selling us an illusory image of a better life - in all kinds of ways as well as cosmetic surgery.”*

### **Intrapersonal factors**

#### **Self-esteem**

A number of respondents in this category referred to the influence of self-esteem in short responses.

*“Self-esteem or lack of it”*

*“Dissatisfaction with body. Mirrors.”*

*“Mostly dissatisfaction with the self--despite whatever source that comes from.”*

*“... they may feel self-conscious about a bodily feature which no one else recognises, comments on, or sees.”*

*“Inner shallowness and vanity. Low self-confidence.”*

*“Poor self-esteem. Concentrating too much on external approvers.”*

Other respondents responded at further length on the role of self-esteem.

*“I am a psychotherapist. Much of the time, I find a person’s negative self-image ‘sits on top of’ deeper beliefs about their personality. They struggle to make sense of complex unpleasant emotions and tend to try and control external circumstances to shore up internal bad feelings. Appearance is one of them and when they change it, guess what? There’s a quick hit of positivity when they get the good feedback from people around them. Then everyone’s seen the change and got used to it and the person simply*

*falls back into old ways of relating and all their demons come back again. External pressure are to blame yes, but so is self-esteem.”*

More generally, respondents also indicated that there are a wide range of interrelated influences that cannot be separated out. For example:

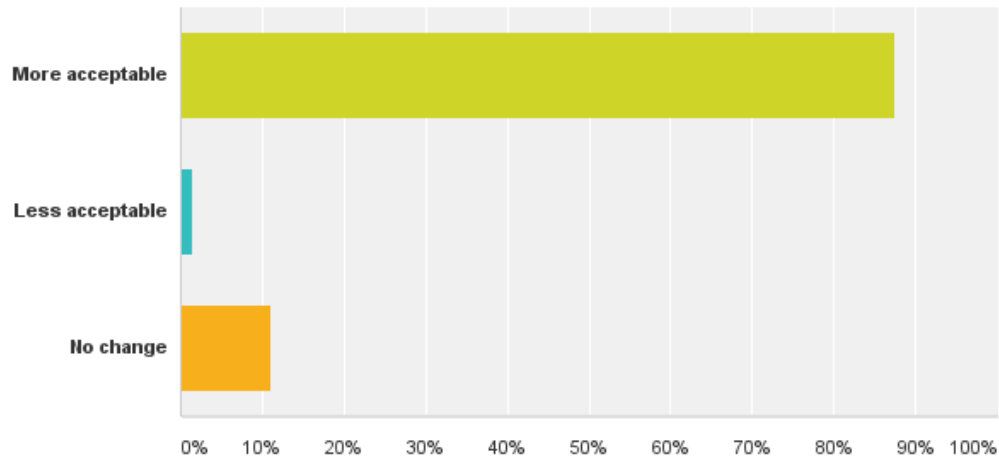
*“Everything influences people’s attitudes to cosmetic procedures because people’s attitudes to cosmetic procedures are embedded in their identity. Like everything about which one might have a view. Identifying a few factors and seeing them as responsible for the desire to appear different, and the will to use cosmetic procedures to obtain it, seems inappropriately reductionist.”*

*“I think all of the above can have an effect.”*

## Question 11

### Q11 Do you think cosmetic procedures have become more or less acceptable in the last ten years?

Answered: 341 Skipped: 107



More acceptable: 87.39% (n=298)

Less acceptable: 1.47% (n=5)

No change: 11.14% (n=38)

#### Respondents who have undergone cosmetic procedures

##### More acceptable

##### **Accessibility and availability of cosmetic procedures**

Several respondents in this category suggest that cosmetic procedures have become more acceptable in the last decade because they have become more easily available and accessible to a wider group of people.

*"They are everywhere"*

*"More accessible and common."*

*"It's like going to the dentist. It's just routine for some people. And that is nothing wrong with it, unless it becomes an obsession."*

Some respondents note particularly that cosmetic procedures are available at a greater number of premises. For example:

*"Burgeoning salons providing services."*

##### **Affordability**

Other respondents note that the acceptability of cosmetic procedures is due to their emerging affordability.

*“We are moving into an age when the procedures are cheaper, safer and quicker.”*

*“Its price is lowered and lowered over the years. Everyone does it from celebrities to normal people.”*

*“It’s more affordable now so within reach of a greater proportion of the population.”*

*“It’s relatively cheap and can be undertaken during your lunch break in some cases depending on the procedure.”*

### **More common**

Respondents also suggest that an increase in acceptability may be due to the fact that cosmetic procedures are more common than they were a decade ago.

*“I know more people that have had them.”*

*“They have become common among societies.”*

*“Everybody is ‘discreetly’ having it in some shape or form.”*

*“There is a snowball effect - the more people have procedures, the more our shared understanding of what ‘normal’ looks like changes. And so more people aspire to look like what they perceive the norm to be, which means more people have procedures and so it goes on.”*

### **Openness around having a cosmetic procedure**

Respondents also suggest that acceptability might be explained by people’s openness in discussing cosmetic procedures.

*“Before people didn’t talk about it and it was not so widely available whereas now it is”*

*“They are more publicly discussed and undertaken”*

*“More and more people have got it done and openly talk about it”*

### **Media influence**

The role of the media in contributing to greater acceptability of cosmetic procedures in the past decade was noted by several respondents.

*“We’re so used to looking at cosmetically altered bodies and faces via the media.”*

*“Largely because of media reporting, although this has also resulted in more criticism.”*

*“It’s in the news all the time and more and more people have it done. There are even TV shows (e.g., Botched), that not only show people having surgery but having it multiple times.”*

Among these respondents, the role of celebrities was particularly noted.

*“So many celebrities resort to appallingly waxy facelifts for example, but even though it looks non-human (almost like a plastic surgery clone), it normalises it”.*

*“Media and celebrity culture. More people having more procedures makes it appear normal and acceptable.”*

*“The rise is definitely due to the celebrity ‘Kardashian’ culture, which makes it all seem so normal and acceptable.”*

### **Less acceptable**

Only one respondent who had undergone cosmetic procedures provided a free text response to support their answer that cosmetic procedures have become less acceptable in the past decade.

*“I feel that the culture that surrounds celebrities and the wider pressures to appear “normal”, even beautiful, have eased somewhat. In some areas of my life cosmetic procedures are now frowned upon as changing a person superficially.”*

### **No change**

Two respondents who had used cosmetic procedures and indicated that there has been *no* change in levels of acceptability over the past decade provided free text responses.

*“Those who have always accepted it continue to do so, and there is a strong section of press / internet / public / politics that continue to either seriously discuss and question of its effects or enjoy hooting at people when it goes wrong (or even right).”*

*“I think it’s actually gone to extremes - people hating on those who do it rather than just being bewildered by it. But probably more people doing it. On average that is maybe ‘no change’?”*

## **Respondents who are considering or have seriously considered cosmetic procedures**

### **More acceptable**

#### **Accessibility and availability of cosmetic procedures**

Some respondents in this category indicated that procedures had become more acceptable in the past decade because of greater accessibility and availability.

*“Cosmetic surgery is more accessible. people are more open about it.”*

*“more ordinary people have access to it”.*

*“When I go to my NHS dentist, cosmetic procedures are advertised and recommended by the receptionist (face peels etc.), I don’t remember seeing this as a child.”*

### **More common**

Several respondents also indicated that procedures had become more acceptable in the last decade because they had concurrently become more commonplace.

*“it is more recognised and is more common amongst a range of people.”*

*“More people are getting them, normalising it in society.”*

*“The volume of people who have had work has increased, thereby making it more acceptable and placing increasing pressure to join in on those who haven’t.”*



*“More acceptable because it is more common.”*

*“it’s so commonplace in our society now, so out in the open that it’s become less stigmatised.”*

Similarly, another respondent suggests that cosmetic procedures have become more routine.

*“It is becoming more routine - it is becoming less of a drastic measure / change.”*

### **Openness around having a cosmetic procedure**

Some respondents in this category also suggest that cosmetic procedures have become more acceptable due to the openness of people who have had procedures.

*“People are trying to be more open with everything nowadays.”*

*“People are more open about cosmetic procedures and medical issues in general. In the past people would hide all health issues”.*

### **Media influence**

General media influence was noted in the free text responses.

*“Reality TV stars and social media models have certainly contributed to this.”*

*“it is rarer to see unmodified breasts on TV than in previous decades (although they have been prevalent since the 90s). Whilst 10 years ago it was seen as sort of freakish to undergo surgery I feel like now it is seen as empowering, and it is more widely believed to be a positive step for people.”*

*“I see it talked about openly on TV (like The Real Housewives series).”*

In particular, the role of media celebrities was highlighted by several respondents who had seriously considered having a cosmetic procedure, including:

*“Many celebrities have them and I think that has made them seem more acceptable.”*

*“The wide use of it amongst celebrities has placed cosmetic procedures in a favourable - almost desirable – light.”*

*“The rise and rise of celebrity culture mediated by social media which pushes cosmetically altered images onto us every day, has helped to normalise the narrative that having a cosmetic procedure is just an extension of going to the hairdresser”.*

The influence of social media is also highlighted by respondents.

*“Social media can make people feel as though it is common place and less of a big deal than previously thought.”*

*“Social media has enhanced the glamour of cosmetic procedures”*

Relatedly, respondents note that cosmetic procedures are more openly advertised than they were a decade ago.

*“Because they are now widely advertised, normalised and widely undertaken.”*

*“It’s at least in the UK widely advertised on TV and magazines.”*

*“Wider promotion and acknowledgement. Botox is almost spoken of as a ‘normal’ now.”*

### **Greater efficiency of procedures**

One free text response suggests that acceptability may be due to the fact that “increased medical technology allows for less invasive procedures with shorter recovery times.”

### **Affordability**

One respondent who offered a free text response suggested that affordability was a factor in greater acceptability of cosmetic procedures. They note: “It’s become cheaper and less obvious that you’ve had something done!”

### **Less acceptable**

No respondents who had seriously considered having a cosmetic procedure provided a free text response to indicate that procedures have become less acceptable in the past decade.

### **No change**

Very few respondents in this category suggested that there was no change in the acceptability of cosmetic procedures in the past decade. Comments received include:

*“I think they are no longer everywhere / in your face but attitudes haven’t really changed. I remember watching lots of prime time TV makeover shows 10 years ago which heavily features plastic surgery as part of the transformation. This is much less common currently.”*

*“I think there have been changes in technology rather than changes in societal attitudes.”*

*“The digital age has simply made us more aware of what has always been going on and the attitudes which accompany them.”*

### **Respondents who have never considered cosmetic procedures**

#### **More acceptable**

Most respondents who indicated that they had never considered cosmetic procedures stated that procedures had become more acceptable.

### **Accessibility and availability of cosmetic procedures**

A number of respondents in this category suggest that the growth in acceptability has been influenced by the accessibility and availability of cosmetic procedures.

*“They have become more frequent and easier to access which indicates a higher social acceptance.”*

*“We now see it being offered in our local beauty salon, beside the corner shop. The influence is spreading and encroaching on everyday life.”*

*“there has been an increase in the number of places offering procedures. If you go to a beauty salon there are a lot of things you can have done straight away. Access is easier.”*

### **Affordability**

Other respondents in this category suggest that the affordability of procedures has led to a growth in their acceptability over the past decade.

*“Some have become cheaper, especially non-surgical procedures, and as more people can afford them and have them, they seem more normal.”*

*“The cost of procedures have come down and some procedures are also available on the NHS, the result being people think it is now their right to undertake a procedure if they are unhappy about themselves in the smallest way”*

*“They are more affordable - it’s not just a celebrity thing anymore.”*

Relatedly, respondents also note perceived increases to people’s disposable income and the availability of credit agreements as contributors to increased acceptability.

*“Individuals in the UK have a greater disposable income”*

*“People seem to have more disposable income.”*

*“Easily obtained credit financing whims.”*

### **More common**

Several respondents in this category indicate that acceptability has increased because procedures are more common than they were a decade ago. Free text responses include:

*“More people decide to have them and, thus, it has simply become more mainstream.”*

*“It is more commonplace and more ‘ordinary’ people (as opposed to celebrities) are having cosmetic surgery.”*

*“The more people one knows who have had cosmetic surgery, the more normal it becomes.”*

*“I’ve seen more and more people undertake them within the upper/middle-class social circles I’m a member of.”*

### **Openness around having a cosmetic procedure**

Free text responses from people who have never considered having a cosmetic procedure also suggest that openness around procedures may contribute to their greater acceptability.

*“More people have them and people are more open about it.”*

*“It seems not to be so much of a problem anymore to talk publicly about it”*

*“... people are much happier to say they have had things done.”*

Respondents also particularly note celebrities' openness around the procedures they have used.

*"Celebrities [are] not so coy about the work they've had done."*

*"People aren't embarrassed by them anymore. Celebrities are very open about it nowadays."*

### **Media influence**

The influence of the media was also highlighted by several respondents who felt that cosmetic procedures are more acceptable now than they were a decade ago. Responses include:

*"I think influence from the media and the expectation that everyone must be 'beautiful' are partly to blame."*

*"Tabloids, beauty magazines, celebrities, social media - they all fuel and make cosmetic procedures the "new normal" by pushing only the positive outcomes of these cosmetic procedures."*

*"With widespread media (e.g. internet, magazines, social media platforms), more and more images of what an "ideal" person should look like are becoming prevalent. People are becoming desensitised to cosmetic procedures".*

The role of TV makeover shows were particularly noted by respondents, including:

*"I think recent television shows such as Embarrassing Bodies and Too Ugly For Love? have made the general public more aware of a wider range of cosmetic procedures and physical abnormalities. Whether this increased awareness makes people more understanding of issues, and therefore less likely to undergo a procedure, or whether it makes people more confident in seeking out a procedure, I cannot say."*

The role of celebrities as a subset of media influence was also raised by respondents who had never considered using cosmetic procedures.

*"They are becoming more and more aspirational due to being associated with a glamorous lifestyle, via celebrities."*

*"I think celebrity culture and documentaries showcasing cosmetic surgery not only makes it more acceptable but also more desired."*

*"I think that 'celebrities' are more open about what they have had done and there have been TV programmes on the subject"*

*"The influences of celebrity culture and criticisms of peoples body image within the media all the time seem to have everyone worrying about what they look like."*

Social media is also noted for its influence over the acceptability of cosmetic procedures.

*"Social media gives more than ever an image of perfection. This affects young people especially."*

*"... the growth of social media means that people's experiences are shared more widely."*

*"I think social networks have had a huge influence on this, same as TV and all the media...they keep bombarding us (especially women) with*

*canons of beauty and how we have to look like. It all seems more and more superficial.”*

Respondents also commented on the role of pornography in leading to increases in acceptability.

*“Pornography is ever more prevalent and accessible, young people might think they are abnormal if they don’t have the odd physiognomy of those in porn.”*

*“Advertising, the pornography industry and so on have become ever more powerful and pervasive in society.”*

### **Greater range of procedures**

Respondents also suggest that acceptability has grown in the past decade because the range of procedures has grown.

*“There are far more procedures available with less dangers and more sophisticated technology that can be done in a faster turn-around time.”*

*“There are more varied procedures available, including some ‘smaller’ procedures, and other cosmetic treatments are becoming more varied (e.g. teeth whitening, permanent makeup, chemical peels).”*

### **Social expectations of how one ‘should’ look**

The view that acceptance has grown because expectations of how one ‘should’ look are higher was also noted by a small number of respondents.

*“Higher expectations on how one should look, the increase in the manner and number of ways to meet a partner and increased choice, put pressure on people to ‘perfect’ themselves in many areas of their lives.”*

*“The constant and overwhelming assault of popular culture with its promotion of a single, limited idea of “beauty” can’t help but make such procedures more mainstream.”*

### **Less acceptable**

Very few respondents who had never had or considered having a cosmetic procedure indicated that cosmetic procedures had become less acceptable in the past decade. Comments received include:

*“I think cosmetic procedures have become a lot more commonplace, but if they cause a very noticeable change (as opposed to being more based in preserving looks, e.g. Botox) then people seem to react very negatively. For example, recently when Renee Zellweger undertook cosmetic surgery she was extremely heavily criticized for it.”*

*“There’s a very much a big ‘us and them’ with people who have cosmetic surgery. I think people are more informed about the risks and know of the ‘addictive’ quality within it, that make individuals ultimately destroy their natural looks. It’s not something everyone has access to and it’s still a luxury over a necessity. Many negative stereotypes for the people who use cosmetic surgery opposite to do not. The veil of ignorance has been lifted so it’s not impressive anymore when a someone whose 45 looks 23, because you know it was surgery. It’s almost laziness.”*

## No change

Some respondents, however, state that they have noticed no change in the acceptability of cosmetic procedures in the past decade. Free text responses that explain the reason for taking this view include:

*“Just more common. People still ridicule them.”*

*“it seems to have been and continue to be relatively taboo. I’m fully aware lots of people undergo cosmetic procedures, but I would assume only a small percentage of those are open about it. I think that’s been the case throughout the last ten years.”*

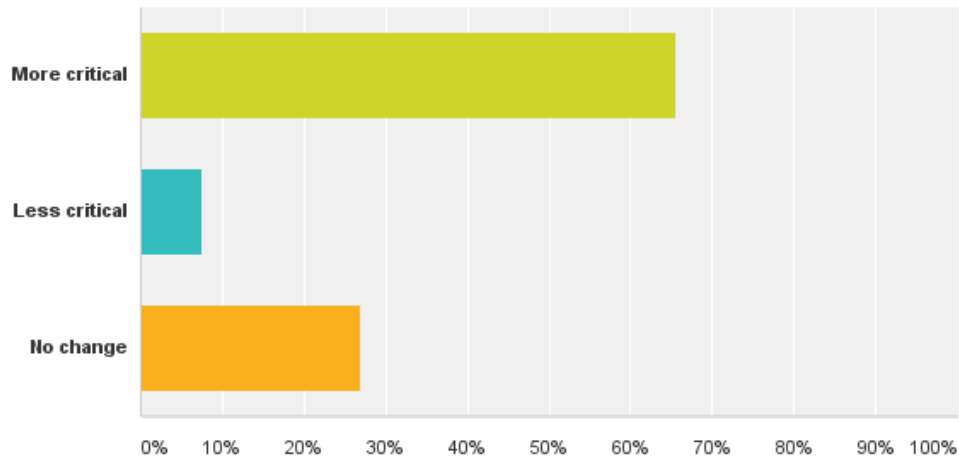
*“I think they have become more “accepted” and routine in today’s society, but I’m not sure that equates to being more acceptable. There is certainly much wider availability, choice and advertising, and a greater number of people undergoing cosmetic procedures.”*



## Question 12

### Q12 Do you think people have become more or less critical about the appearance of others in the last ten years?

Answered: 333 Skipped: 115



More critical: 65.47% (n=218)

Less critical: 7.51% (n=25)

No change: 27.03% (n=90)

**Please tell us why you think this.**

#### Respondents who have undergone cosmetic procedures

##### More critical

##### *Changes to the importance placed on appearance*

Some free text responses suggest that people have become more critical of others' appearance in the last decade because of changes to the importance placed on looks. Responses include:

*"The appearance has become an important feature taken into account when someone is making a judgement related to others."*

*"There is a culture in which a higher value is placed on people's appearance - hypercritical due to images in the media and plastic surgery."*

##### **Media influence**

One respondent notes that increased criticism of others' appearance has been influenced by the media:

*"The amount of media around us increases, and the exposure of 'perfect bodies' in media on our lives as well. As a result, people will compare themselves to the images they see in advertisement, media, etc. and are more likely to critique themselves and others around them."*

More broadly, another respondent notes that “we receive more and more inputs about body image every day.”

### ***Documenting appearance through social media***

Respondents note that using social media to document appearance may have contributed to a perceived growth in criticism of others’ appearance.

*“Selfies and posts on social media, it makes people more conscious of how they look. The fact that we can take photos on our phones and see them instantly, on older cameras people had to wait until photos were developed to see them and couldn’t view them instantly.”*

*“Far more focus on looks and documenting in pictures all of your life.”*

*“The increasing use of social media means we’re provided with someone’s best look and never their normal everyday skin / face / hair / body. People are able to digitally enhance themselves with their own mobile phones, therefore if real life people don’t conform to this online appearance there’s a lot of criticism that can occur.”*

Abuse received via social media channels was also highlighted by one respondent in this category:

*“Social media trolls are common I have more people asking why I haven’t had birthmark removed (laser did not work, camouflage not work)”*

### ***Expectations around ‘fixing’ oneself***

Respondents suggest that the availability of procedures to change how one looks leads to an expectation that one *should* change one’s looks, leading to higher levels of appearance criticism. For example:

*“because there is the option to do something about it whereas before some things were just taken for granted as unchangeable there doesn’t seem to be anything which cannot be altered or corrected now - with the option available perhaps makes people more critical.”*

*“I think people who struggle with weight and other cosmetic issues are view as neglectful of society is able to see the flaws that don’t conform to societal norms because we have so much technology to “fix” flaws.”*

*“In an awful way, the opportunity to have surgery has made women apparently more responsible for the choice not to make themselves more attractive to men. Not having big boobs or a Kardashian arse is a choice, since you have the choice to make yourself attractive in a pornographic way to men via surgery.”*

*“Now there doesn’t seem to be an excuse for not sorting out one’s ‘tired looking eye bags’, it seems like a lack of discipline almost, to ‘let oneself go’ aesthetically.”*

### ***Open criticism of others’ appearance***

A growth in criticism of others’ appearance in the last decade was also felt to be explained by a greater willingness to *openly* criticise others.

*“We live in a very critical culture - people love to criticize others.”*

*"I don't think that my family would have commented on the outcome of my surgery if it had happened 10 years ago. It is the constant striving for so called / perceived perfection that creates an environment where such comments are permissible."*

*"... there is a growing proportion of men who hate women and 'f\*\*k off you're ugly' has been a favourite way to shut women up forever."*

### **Less critical**

Very few respondents who had used cosmetic procedures provided free text responses to support the view that people have become less critical of others' appearance in the past decade. Comments received include:

*"Greater acceptability of individuals as they are; greater attempt within the commercial sphere to cater to their differences as evidenced for example in the promotion of varying sizes in women etc."*

*"Unless it is very extreme e.g. extra-large breast enlargement (think Katie Price), people are less critical."*

### **No change**

Respondents in this category who felt that there had been no change in levels of criticism for others' appearance offer a range of explanations for their response, including:

*"We've always been quite critical of others' appearances. However, the opportunities to see and comment on the appearances of others have increased."*

*"People have always been this critical, but there are more ways to spread their opinion now. So, someone might go on TV 10 years ago and in your front room you'd watch and say to your friends they were ugly; now you'd also go on Twitter to say it and it escalates. So if your question had been "do you think people are more harmful with their criticism than 10 years ago" the answer is definitely yes. But human nature hasn't changed. We were just as horrible 10 years ago."*

*"In the last ten years, perhaps criticism is more visible, with the explosion of internet click bait and the ability to leave comments on everyone. There are pushes against photo shopping perfection, but the norm is still to do that, and in increasingly profound ways. There's also an increasing need to stay young as our celebrities strive to look 20 years younger than they are."*

*"Popular culture has been obsessed with the way people look for years"*

*"it's more a matter of self-criticism."*

## **Respondents who are considering or have seriously considered cosmetic procedures**

### **More critical**

Respondents in this category indicate a range of arguments to support their view that people are more critical of others' appearance than they were a decade ago.

## **Comparisons to celebrity ideals**

Free text responses also suggest that more critical attitudes might be explained through comparisons to celebrity ideals.

*“The culture today of setting up celebrities as examples of how to live a supposedly perfect life is insidious and makes it a hard step for young women and girls to move away from this model.”*

*“Celebs make us crazy... well actually it’s all Heat Magazine’s fault.”*

*“increase in celebrity culture of how people should be perceived”*

## **Media influence**

The influence of the media was also noted. For example:

*“I definitely blame reality TV for this. Putting ‘ordinary’ people on television in unflattering situations inevitably invites critique of individuals--behaviour and appearance.”*

## **Access to pornography online**

One free text response notes the role of online pornography

*“access to online pornography has had a huge effect on what inexperienced people expect from bodies. Pubic hair is a real example of this - having started new relationships after 15 years with one man since the 1990s, it has been a real surprise to find that men trim / shave their pubic hair, and their expectation of women’s!”*

## **Documenting appearance through social media**

The role of social media, and how it is used to document appearance was cited as a contributor to increasing appearance criticism by several respondents, including:

*“Development of media (conventional and social media) focuses excessively on photographs and being photogenic which is linked to appearance.”*

*“With more and more young people engaging in social media and celebrity obsessions in which people can follow and watch their favourite celebrities’ posts. They are constantly looking at people who are flawless and they are forced to compare this to their own appearance.”*

*“Nowadays people see many more photos of themselves and each other than before due to social media and smartphones.”*

*“... expectations are a lot higher and people are more critical of how others look facially and bodily. Especially due to Instagram, snapchat, twitter, Facebook and YouTube; these are all platforms which are based on popularity and looks.”*

*“The easy and ready availability of the Internet and social media making it infinitely more accessible for us to scrutinize and be scrutinized in terms of appearance. Society in general is becoming more shallow / appearance focused with apps and the Internet and social media widely encouraging this despite this outcome not necessarily being the app’s / website’s objective.”*

*“... the advent of cameras that are ubiquitous and de rigeur has increased this narrowing of what is ‘allowed’ in terms of looks and body types.”*

### **Open criticism of others’ appearance**

Respondents in this category also note that criticism of others’ appearance has become more open in the last decade.

*“It seems more acceptable to make personal remarks about the appearance of others nowadays. ‘Bitching’, ‘trolling’ is becoming an acceptable social norm in our society.”*

*“The Internet and social media allow people to publicly comment on others’ appearance. This can become a normalised and almost automatic cognitive response to viewing another’s picture and leads to judgement and comparison.”*

*“Social media and the internet allow millions of people to share their opinions on images, and trolling seems to be a very popular phenomenon, particularly of women who hold positions of power. I am guilty of it myself - I was watching TV the other day with my partner and an older, overweight male actor was depicted in the shower. I said something like “oh god I don’t need to see that”, and then a few minutes later I thought about what I’d said and realised I didn’t even mean it.”*

### **Less critical**

Other respondents in this category indicate their view that people have become less critical, and instead more accepting. For example:

*“I’ve noticed that there does seem to be better social acceptance of overweight people and people with visible disabilities, most likely due to increased exposure in media”.*

*“I think it was perhaps a lot more socially acceptable to be vicious, and bitchy - the red circle of shame etc. Maybe that still happens but it’s being challenged.”*

*“I feel like we’re leaving a perfectionist era and cycling back to a hippy, love yourself and others as they are era. It’s like history repeated itself, last decade is the current equivalent to the 1950s and now were headed to a neo-1960s free love stage again.”*

### **No change**

Respondents indicate a range of reasons for holding that there has been no change to people’s criticism of others’ appearance.

*“I have no way to judge this but I don’t think I have noticed more criticism by my friends and relatives.”*

*“Whilst conversations about appearance I believe have increased and connect people across younger demographics, I don’t think people have become more or less critical.”*

*“I don’t think people are inherently more critical. Just that our bodies are more exposed and on show now. With all the image based media around I think it makes us more vulnerable to criticism and surveillance.”*

*"I feel that there has always been a level of criticalness about others' appearances - particularly by the media, which then influences how people respond to other people."*

## **Respondents who have never considered cosmetic procedures**

### **More critical**

#### **Changes to the importance placed on appearance**

Some respondents in this category suggest that people are more critical of others' appearance because appearance has itself had more importance placed on it in the last decade.

*"We are an image-obsessed society. Appearance is presented as the key to success, relationships and ultimately happiness. With this we become more discerning about what is the 'ideal' appearance and thus less accepting of others and ourselves."*

*"I think people's belief about what a normal person looks like is more groomed - fancier clothes, more makeup and stuff, and that makes people more critical of actual people."*

*"It just seems that nobody can look right nowadays."*

*"Appearance seems to have become even more important than before in our judgements of others. With social media and TV programmes such as the Fashion Police or fashion blogs, many people think they have become 'experts' in aesthetics and can judge others about their appearance left and right."*

*"People take others at face value before they know anything about the person."*

#### **Media influence**

Respondents in this category draw particular attention to the role of the media in the perceived growth in critical views on others' appearance.

*"Celebrity culture - media - magazines that highlight celebrities' imperfections e.g. underarm sweat!"*

*"Lots of magazines seems extremely mean and bitchy, and I suspect this is part of a wider cultural trend."*

*"Reality TV has some impact."*

*"The Daily Mail 'sidebar' of shame, exposing all parts of women's bodies to comment, long lens paparazzi, 'selfie' culture and 'likes' on social media".*

*"Increased sexualisation of the female body through modelling, film, celebrity culture."*

*"Media - everyone must be beautiful"*

*"Body shaming in the press is disgracefully common."*

#### **Documenting appearance through social media**

Several respondents indicated that more critical attitudes to others' appearance could be explained through reference to social media.



*“Social media allows people and strangers more freely to comment on others appearance.”*

*“I think we have more invasive tools for criticism these days – e.g. social media”.*

*“... the increasing use of social media on the internet, and the availability of info and photos of celebrities on the internet means that people pay even more attention to what other people think than they used to. Whereas before they might have mostly paid attention to the people they see every day and to their friends and family, now people are more aware of the wider social world, and this makes them compare themselves to other people more than ever.”*

*“We have more and more people posting photographs of themselves online, and I think that people who don’t fit the conventional standards of beauty will be more likely to compare themselves to others and feel like they don’t fit in.”*

*“Celebrity culture, social media etc. means people are being compared or criticised very often and this criticism becomes part our culture. I think the more that is expected of us, the more we feel we would like to criticise others.”*

*“When I compare the photos we took when we were at school (high school) compared to the photos posted on social media by children of the same age now it is unbelievable (and worrying). So much focus is on appearance and looking the right way- hence all of the filters on Instagram etc.”*

*“Social media and the perpetuation of the “selfie culture” which promotes the desire to look good in front of others.”*

*“... the growth of social media and anonymity on the internet [means] that people feel much more comfortable openly criticising the appearance of others, so such criticism is much more widespread and common than it would have been in the past”.*

### **Comparisons to celebrity ideals**

The role celebrity comparisons was also noted by respondents in this category.

*“I think people are so used to seeing perfect, airbrushed images of celebrities and the like that they become hypercritical of imperfection in themselves and in others.”*

*“Cosmetic procedures are now seen as a quick fix and as such people believe everyone should look perfect, in particular in celebrity culture”*

### **Expectations around ‘fixing’ oneself**

One respondent notes that a growth in criticism of others may result from changed expectations of people needing to ‘fix’ their appearance.

*“There is an expectation now for people to take care of themselves, spend money on their appearance and are encouraged to look younger wherever possible.”*

### **Open criticism of others’ appearance**

Respondents in this category also observe more open criticism of others’ appearance.

*“Society getting more outspoken and perhaps less kind.”*

*“People are much more vocal about the appearance of others. There are more ways to express views, using social media etc.”*

*“It seems to become the norm in the media to comment about personal appearance. I suspect this might be influencing the views of the general public.”*

### Less critical

Fewer respondents indicated that people’s assessment of others’ appearance had become less critical. Those who did choose this option offer a range of reasons for their response, including:

*“I think in general there is a sense in which we are encouraged to be more accepting of individual differences of all kinds, and appearance falls under this overall notion.”*

*“People are more conscious that beauty is more than meeting characteristics.”*

*“There are more body positivity movements nowadays, and they become more widely heard of through social media, and that makes people less critical.”*

*“There has been a move towards improved self-body image and acceptance of body appearance, especially for teens.”*

*“While people still continue to be critical of appearances, I think it has declined. There have been noticeable and widespread reactions to the likes of the Daily Mail “sidebar of shame” kind of culture.”*

### No change

Several respondents in this category indicated that there was ‘no change’ in response to this question. A range of reasons were offered for this view, including:

*“I think we’ve always been highly focused on appearance, at least since the invention of modern media.”*

*“There have always been some who are critical of others’ appearance and other aspects.”*

*“I think there have been shifts in both directions - both greater emphasis on physical ‘perfection’ in the media, preoccupation with appearance in selfies, on the one hand and a more assertive disability equality movement on the other.”*

*“We may have more channels of media and communications where we can access more of what people are saying about each other but they’re still the same critiques people have always been saying to one another.”*

*“I think it’s probably about the same, people have always been critical about other’s appearance, the only difference is that now you can criticize more people since it all works with internet and social networks - so you have more “friends”, “followers”, and all that stuff, you can basically access more people, but the critical intensity is probably the same.”*

*“It was ever thus, I think. We see more of such criticism due to social media but snide comments about people’s appearance have been with us since the Ark.”*

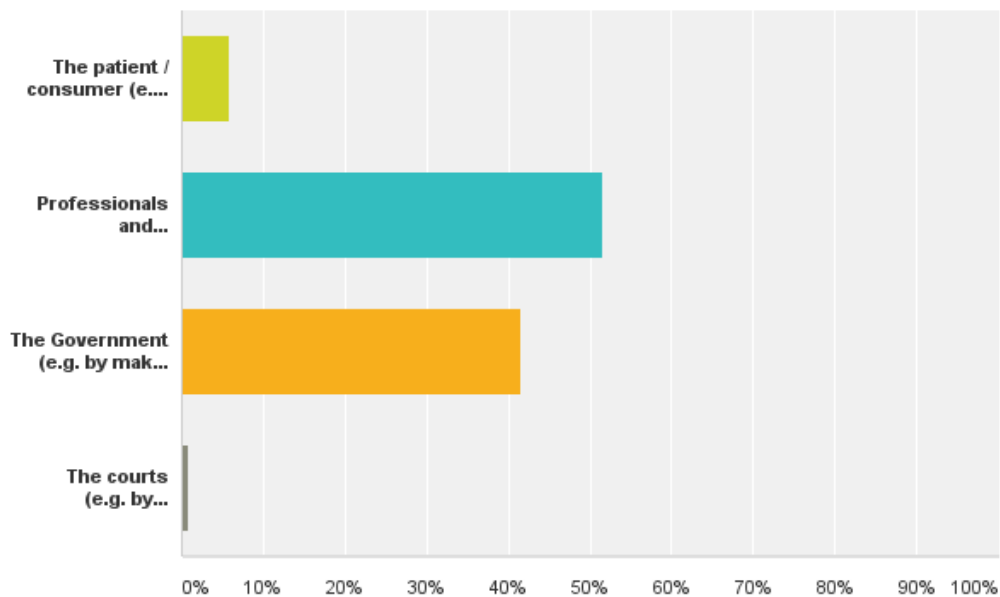
One respondent, however, adds a caveat to his / her response, regarding age:

*“in ‘real life’ there is little change regarding our views towards the appearance of others perhaps with the exception of children and adolescents, who I fear are under considerable peer pressure as a result of social media.”*

## Question 13

**Q13 Who do you think should have the main responsibility for making sure that cosmetic procedures are carried out safely? (Please choose just one.)**

Answered: 337 Skipped: 111



Several respondents in this category expressed frustration that the survey only allowed one option to be chosen, and indicated that the answer was a combination of all parties listed. For example, one respondent who had considering using cosmetic procedures and ticked the 'professionals and professional organisations' option states:

*"I have chosen professionals however this is too black and white for me. I think patients have a responsibility to be health literate and make sure they investigate the surgery they want, the practitioner they want to use, evaluate the risks, etc. The Government needs to make sure there are clear regulations governing cosmetic surgery, e.g., licencing, etc. The courts need to be sensible in upholding the law. But in the end, I think it is up to the professional and the professional bodies to make sure that there is an acceptable level of care given to patients."*

### Respondents who have undergone cosmetic procedures

#### The patient / consumer

Free text answers from respondents in this category include:

*"Although all mentioned entities have an important role to play in setting and monitoring standards etc., it is ultimately up to the patient, for their own benefit, to be responsible."*

*"A correctly trained beauty therapist is just as skilled and safe to use a medically trained doctor for non invasive cosmetic surgery. Customers*

*should do their research. The government have more worrying priorities like lack of nurses and junior doctors strikes to be worrying about regulating the industry.”*

## **Professionals / professional bodies**

A greater proportion of respondents who had used cosmetic procedures indicated that responsibility should lie with professionals. A range of supporting statements were given, including:

*“All medical procedures need to be subject to review by peers and collectively overseen.”*

*“These people are trained in their field to know the risks giving them a responsibility to act accordingly making patients and consumers aware of this whilst regulating self-practice.”*

*“Most procedures are invasive and risky. We depend on professional standards.”*

*“The burden is on professionals to ensure that they are operating under high standards.”*

*“I’m a medical professional, and I think it’s important for us to act responsibly, ethically, and always in the patient’s best interest.”*

*“the biggest responsibility lies in the hands of the professional providing that procedure. This is because they have the final say on whether the person can have something done, if it is safe, they need to be competent and confident in what they do, they should be able to spot complications and adhere to safety measures.”*

*“As with offering any risky service, it is up to the providers to make it safe and give accurate information.”*

## **The Government**

Several respondents in this category stated that the main responsibility for safety lies with the government. Free text responses include:

*“... because so many are now having plastic surgery, the Government needs to make strict laws about legalities and responsibilities. It’s not usually to do with the NHS, as only those surgeries that are considered vital/reconstructive are funded by NHS, but I think only the Government can make laws and ensure that professional bodies adhere to strict standards.”*

*“Ultimately it has to be the government that passes legislation to outlaw bad practice.”*

*“Needs to be someone above the professionals regulating standards”*

*“The government should make sure they are strict regulations that are adhered to... regulation has been slack for over a decade and surgeons etc. have been fighting for stricter regulations, and when things do go wrong somebody should be held accountable.”*

## **The courts**

No free text responses from individuals who have used cosmetic procedures were given to support the view that the courts should have the main responsibility for safety.

## Respondents who are considering or have seriously considered cosmetic procedures

### The patient / consumer

Two free text responses supported the view taken by respondents in this group who felt that the main responsibility for safety should lie with the patient / consumer.

*“So long as the practise is legal and has the appropriate qualifications then I don’t see why the government or anyone else should shape the way you look.”*

*“Private enforcement tends generally to be the most efficient form of rule enforcement.”*

### Professionals / professional bodies

Supporting free text statements to support the view that responsibility should lie with professionals include:

*“There should be clear rules but for this to be successful, I believe the professionals and professional bodies are in the best position to ensure safe and effective practise.”*

*“Responsibility has to rest with the expert practitioners who understand the technicalities and their implications.”*

*“Doctors have a duty of care to the patients which should be applied across every procedure, regardless of whether it is life-saving or cosmetic.”*

*“It should always be the person / facility offering the service to disclose all relevant risks and safety guidelines to patients. Also, they should just plain old be good at their job, nobody wants a faulty face lift.”*

*“Consumers wishing to purchase a cosmetic procedure should be able to do so in the knowledge that doctors operating in the UK offering cosmetic surgery services, are properly qualified and regulated to the same standard as surgeons in other fields of medicine.”*

### The Government

Some respondents who had considered using cosmetic procedures felt that the main responsibility for safety was down to the Government.

*“... although it can’t be guaranteed that the government would stay impartial it appears to be the best option to prevent bad practice.”*

*“The Government ought to have the interests of the patients and citizens in mind... They will be able to hold the professionals accountable and to protect the vulnerable.”*

More specifically, respondents indicated that they felt that the Government should have the main responsibility for safety because they distrusted professionals to uphold high standards. For example:

*“it would be foolish to expect professionals who make money from giving people surgery to self-regulate. Even though many practitioners would operate by high standards, without government regulation there would be some practitioners who take advantage of vulnerable people.”*



*“As a business, many professionals may attempt to cut corners in order to offer competitive prices therefore the government should attempt to keep measures in place to avoid this / hold individuals and companies responsible.”*

*“My God. These professional bodies shouldn’t get to self-regulate, there’s too little incentive to be tough on violators or cautious about new procedures. The public can’t access all the information they need.”*

*“Ideally the patient and professionals should be able to hold the main responsibilities but consumers are too easily manipulated to make wise choices in a lot of cases and professionals can be swayed by profit motivations or ego to make questionable choices. A dispassionate impartial 3rd party is needed for oversight at least at a basic level regarding patient safety. The government role should not go beyond safety and efficacy concerns.”*

## **The courts**

No free text responses from individuals who have considered using cosmetic procedures were given to support the view that the courts should have the main responsibility for safety.

## **Respondents who have never considered cosmetic procedures**

### **The patient / consumer**

Free text responses for this category included:

*“It’s their life.”*

*“It is ultimately an individual decision and there is always plenty of choice as regards which practitioner to use, as well as the reasonable choice not to undergo the surgery at all. If there are risks, it is the responsibility of the patient to be aware of them.”*

*“The prime responsibility for our own bodies needs to be ourselves. That doesn’t imply that law, government and professional aren’t also responsible for preventing (self) abuse.”*

### **Professionals / professional bodies**

A number of free text responses were given by individuals who had never considered using cosmetic procedures to support the view that responsibility for safety should lie with professionals.

*“These are the people carrying out the procedures; it’s their responsibility to get them right”*

*“I believe that professions should be regulated and accountable to their professional bodies.”*

*“It has to start with the health professionals who provide the services - we can’t expect patients to take this responsibility.”*

*“Professionals and professional bodies, operating in accordance with high standards borne out of ethical and medical guidance are the best people to make sure that cosmetic procedures are carried out safely because they understand the risks, have access to peer-reviewed research and what is happening internationally as well as nationally.”*

*“If professionals are irresponsible there will be no way to make it safer!!!”*

*“I think they are the ones who have the knowledge to advise patients, to ensure procedures are done safely and when required. They have more tools to raise awareness and to operate to high standards.”*

*“The ‘profession’ is making billions and needs to clean up its image, its act and the way it does business. Please don’t forget that at its heart we are talking business.”*

## The Government

Other respondents felt that the main responsibility for safety should lie with the Government. Free text responses to support this view include:

*“All procedures should be regulated with clear rules and regs. The impact of something going wrong is significant. Only trained and regulated professionals should be able to carry out procedures.”*

*“The government can protect impartially”.*

*“Government is the highest authority - they should control it, not leave it to doctors/customers, or to courts after it went wrong.”*

*“I think that professionals have a responsibility to ensure that they are acting ethically and in the best interests of the patients. I think this can only be achieved by having more regulated policies and guidance around procedures. I feel that this lies with professional bodies, but that without government regulations to enforce this, then professional guidelines may not be sufficient.”*

*“Legal guidelines should be enforced by the state; people’s safety matters, and we shouldn’t wait for things to go wrong before action is taken.”*

*“Government should be responsible for regulating procedures so that there are clear rules on who, what and how such procedures take place. Without high level regulation people will end up having botched jobs.”*

*“Government should set clear guidelines surrounding procedures because they can make sure that procedures are regulated for example through registration schemes.”*

*“Given the risks associated with cosmetic procedures I think we need responsibility at the highest level”.*

Similar to the group of respondents who had considered using cosmetic procedures, individuals in this group also indicated that their choice here was informed by a distrust of professionals.

*“Do not trust the profession, unfortunately. But should be both professional standards as well as government regulation.”*

*“The state should strongly regulate such industries. A proper materialist analysis shows us that professional bodies and the industry have a strong incentive to maximise their own profits by encouraging as many people as possible to undertake procedures and cut costs by lowering safety standards.”*

*“It should be the government because there is no guarantee that people offering cosmetic procedures will stick to the standards of professional bodies or be intimidated by the courts.”*

*“I wish the responsibility to rest at the highest level possible and not to be in the hands of people who might stand to profit from selling access to procedures.”*

*“I don’t think professionals can be trusted to regulate themselves in what is a very lucrative business.”*

Respondents also suggest that the Government and professional bodies should work together to ensure the safety of users of procedures.

*“I think the government should work with professional bodies to set clear guidelines on when and whether procedures should be carried out, particularly in relation to children and vulnerable adults. However, this would not stop determined people from travelling to other countries to undergo surgery if they were denied it in this country.”*

*“There has to be some state regulation of professional standards, but I think that regulation needs to be informed by professional bodies.”*

*“Well actually I think it should be professional / professional bodies collaborating with the government. But you can only choose one so I guess I have go with the nanny state bias. :-)”*

*“I’ve ticked the government, but I also mean a professional regulatory body, i.e. they should work in tandem - no professional body should be self-regulating without oversight, but at the same time governments can’t make decisions without expert knowledge and input.”*

## **The courts**

Two free text responses supported this view.

*“My initial thoughts are that the courts should provide a case-by-case judgement, which can provide the main impetus for government, professional, and patient/consumer regulation. I’m not particularly sure why I think this is the case.”*

*“Because it is becoming such a large industry.”*

## Other comments

**Question 14: Is there anything else important that you think we should know about cosmetic procedures?**

The summary of this question only includes novel points made by respondents in each of the three respondent categories. Where comments have already been addressed elsewhere in this summary document, they are not included here.

### Respondents who have undergone cosmetic procedures

#### ***Personal experiences***

Some respondents used this section to highlight further their own personal experiences of cosmetic procedures.

*“Now I felt it is perverse... I wish I never had done it”*

*“I went from being unemployed to being offered a really good job after I had the bags under my eyes removed. But I had to go to the Czech Republic for my procedure.”*

#### ***General views on cosmetic procedures***

A number of respondents used this section to indicate their general opinions about cosmetic procedures.

*“I believe some cosmetic procedures can be good and effect someone’s life positively however I do feel this is not the only way to affect their life positively nor should it be a way to improve your life.”*

*“It is here to stay.”*

*“They are certainly not going to go away, and the current turf wars among professionals is not a benefit to the patients.”*

*“I feel that some cosmetic procedures have become trivialised over the last few decades. For some people, these procedures are absolutely essential for their health and survival. In our image-conscious society, the number of people in this group is most likely increasing.”*

#### ***Financial considerations***

One respondent notes the importance of considering financial aspects of cosmetic procedures.

*“There is also the problem of cost and insurance coverage and these topics were not covered in the survey but should have been. Please don’t leave this out.”*

### Respondents who are considering or have seriously considered cosmetic procedures

#### ***General views on cosmetic procedures***

Some general views on cosmetic procedures were provided in response to this question.

*“They are not necessary to personal welfare.”*

*“It is still a taboo”*

*“Each to their own.”*

*“Cosmetic procedures are here to stay.”*

### **Financial considerations**

Financial considerations were also noted by respondents.

*“Making money by feeding off an individual’s insecurities about their personal appearance is immoral.”*

*“... cosmetic surgery has become big business and costs far too much. I think there needs to be some sort of research done into how to make cosmetic surgery more affordable but also more realistic. Perhaps all people who are going to have cosmetic surgery should have a psychological examination too.”*

Relatedly, one respondent states:

*“They seem to be about ‘today’ and the present but do not look at the future, i.e. when you’re 50, not 30, and your breasts no longer seem quite so important (i.e. a maturing in one’s attitude / change in priorities), also the financial commitment to maintaining them for the rest of your life.”*

### **Gender issues**

The role of gender was noted by two individuals’ responses to this question.

*“I am particularly concerned about the effects of media, social media and pornography on girls and women and would like to see campaigns which are credible to prompt females to consider the alternatives to such procedures - having an emphasis on being ok in your own skin and working towards more holistic wellbeing. If we do not address this directly we are in danger, as a society, of lowering the morale of the female sex, and as research in every area of society has always shown, low female morale has devastating effects on the health and wellbeing of every society.”*

*“Is the take-up of cosmetic procedures equal between all genders, and has this balance remained the same over recent years?”*

## **Respondents who have never considered cosmetic procedures**

### **Definitions**

*There needs to be some definitions of types of procedures and who should carry them out, and what qualifications are necessary.*

### **General views on cosmetic procedures**

General views offered by respondents who had never considered using cosmetic procedures were generally negative.

*“It is predominantly a trivial and damaging process”.*

*“They [cosmetic procedures] should not be portrayed as an easy fix for whatever is causing someone an emotional problem e.g. disliking the shape of their nose and they should be encouraged to address their mental issues before undergoing surgery.”*

*“We are creating some very perverse individuals who seem to be under the impression that a surgeon’s work is something for \*them\* to be “proud of” when all they did was pay and be operated upon, and even more perverse members of the opposite sex who are attracted to bags of silicone and other substances implanted under the skin in various locations. Cosmetic procedures have no place in a society or individual lives of the emotionally and mentally healthy.”*

*“Certain procedures encourage the perception that everything can be fixed by surgery rather than diet and exercise when talking about stapling, liposuction, tummy tuck etc.”*

*“Ummm... that they’re mostly a stupid idea? :-)”*

More positively, one respondent notes:

*“They’re not all frivolous. You know that of course but I think it is worth emphasising.”*

### **Financial considerations**

*“I do feel that NHS money should not be spent on these cosmetic procedures for people not happy with looks, instead they should be offered therapy sessions to discuss why they’re not happy with themselves.”*

*“I think they should not be available on the NHS, with the possible exception of people who have survived burns or other injuries that require reconstruction so that they can function.”*

*“I don’t think they should be publicly funded except where they are trauma related or health related.”*

*“It should not be paid by taxes or insurance companies if they are only cosmetic and not to modify clear abnormalities.”*

### **Gender issues**

*“In my view, women should be encouraged to love themselves as they are.”*

*“Where they are permissible there may pressure for people to have them. This can be very direct - for example Asian women who are pursuing a career on television in the USA often have to have eyelid surgery in order to get hired in the same way that black women may not have afro hair.”*

On the question of potential crossover between female genital cosmetic surgery and female genital mutilation, one respondent states:

*“Cosmetic genital surgery should be prosecuted as female genital mutilation as it’s a harmful recent fashion related to cultural norms”.*

### **Criticisms of the survey**

Across all groups of respondents, there were several criticisms that this survey – which was aimed at a general public audience – was too general to provide helpful results.



*“Some of the questions in this survey are too unspecific to answer and I am not sure how you are going to interpret your results? e.g. the one about children - some people will be answering from the perspective of correcting severe facial visible difference such as widespread birthmarks, while others will think you are referring to more ‘trivial’ issues like wrinkles. I think you should make it clear \*how\* extreme the changes are in your survey. I’m not sure this data will be reliable given the fact that some will consider more extreme cases and some will consider less extreme cases.”*

## About you

**Question 15: Please tell us anything about yourself which you think may be relevant to your views about cosmetic procedures (e.g. age, gender, etc.).**

Respondents offered several points of information about themselves in response to this question. The information provided included their age, sex, medical history, sexual orientation, family background, ethnic origins, and occupation. However, as this information was not provided by all respondents, and was gathered in the form of free text responses, an analysis of submissions to this question cannot be provided.