



Reshaping the Female Body: The Dilemma of Cosmetic Surgery

By Kathy Davis

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

Cosmetic surgery is a growth industry. Despite the expense and the risks of infection and unsatisfactory outcome, many women still choose to have their bodies altered. Davis, a professor of women's studies in the Netherlands, interviewed physicians, surgeons, and women before and after their operations to learn about their involvement in cosmetic surgery. She discovered that most of the women wanted to correct perceived defects so that they would appear ordinary and that they did this to please themselves, not men. Although she is a feminist, Davis argues against the traditional, politically correct stance that cosmetic surgery is oppression (found in works like Naomi Wolf's *The Beauty Myth*, LJ 4/1/91) and states that deciding to undergo a procedure is in fact an act of empowerment that improves the lives of these women. She considers cosmetic surgery a complex dilemma rather than an absolute evil. Not an essential purchase, but women's studies collections will want to add it for balance.

Barbara M. Bibel, Oakland P.L., Cal.

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From [Booklist](#)

Medical sociologist Davis tries to codify the complex decision-making process women undergo when deciding whether to alter their appearance surgically and to reconcile how a feminist could choose to alter her body to fit the "gendered social order" and remain a feminist. So striving, she studies women in the Netherlands (one of the few nations in which cosmetic surgery is a publicly insured medical procedure) who are considering or have already been through cosmetic surgery. Against this backdrop of real cases she pits feminist theory, especially concerning beauty, and comes up with two diametrically opposed points of view. Davis herself takes a position somewhere between the extremes and consequently becomes rather an outcast from the feminist social theory community. Although she never resolves the dilemma posed by the extreme positions acceptably, she brings to the surface complicated issues of female identity, beauty, social acceptability, "normality," and self-esteem; as she does, she offers new perspectives on some rather tiresome feminist debates. *Mary Ellen Sullivan*

Review

"well-written analysis...powerful...fascinating...will intrigue medical sociologists and feminists alike.." --
European Journal of Women's Studies

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