

# Under the blade – or the needle, ‘Silicon psychosis’

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## Abstract

The pursuit of beauty has long shaped societal standards and personal identities, from ancient times to the modern age. While historical practices like Cleopatra's milk baths or kohl-lined eyes had cultural significance, today's beauty ideals are largely influenced by social media and cosmetic technology. Procedures such as the Brazilian Butt Lift (BBL) have surged in popularity but come with significant health risks, including death, embolism, and infection. Despite warnings from health authorities, many individuals continue to seek risky or unregulated surgeries, often abroad, driven by unrealistic expectations. This piece explores the evolving standards of beauty, the medical concerns surrounding cosmetic interventions, and the social pressures that fuel them.

**Key words:** aesthetic, cosmetic surgery, social media, body image, health risks.

## Introduction and synopsis

Beauty is the obvious new indicator of social worth, and people are always tempted to improve their aesthetic standards. However, the desire for beauty is not a new phenomenon, and well-documented beauty practices have a long history. For instance, Cleopatra, who used a milk bath to keep her beauty alluring, the usage of kohl to darken, define and enhance the eyes, vegetable dyes on cheeks and lips to make them rosy and red, and hair adornments. Also, some went to extremes to conform to the societal identity and the prescribed modes of beauty, like binding of the feet, ritual tattooing, and body scarification.

To draw some points about aesthetics and how they are touching our life especially nowadays we are using the social media platforms, and they have all bombarded a greater impact on the public consciousness with all sorts of cosmetic technology which range from minor to extreme and the kind of things that nowadays people seem to be preoccupied and captivated with like sizable curvy appealing butts for both genders nonetheless. Appearance has become an obsessive focal point for the majority, especially women.

For instance, the trendy Brazilian butt lift (BBL) which has risen concerns, and the recent declaration in the UK according to the advertising standard authority for it posing great risk of death and danger. The Authority stated it is misleading, very imprudent, and proponents are downplaying the seriousness of the health risk associated as is the pressure on targeted customers with their time-bound offers.

The Brazilian butt lifts and the superficial gluteal liposuction, are colourful terms that tempt and allure a lot of people. In 2018, the clinical data showed a high death rate associated with Brazilian butt lifts, and it has been stated that volume augmentation with implants or fat became a trend in 2020.

In 2015 there were reports of intraoperative mortality related problems like pulmonary embolism which has also raised a serious concern, and in 2018 a review stated that injecting in the subcutaneous plane would reduce the mortality rather than being injected in the deeper muscle or crossing the fascia which can be guarded by using intraoperative ultrasound to ensure that the injection has been laid down correctly within the plane only and did not cross the fascia or compromise it causing serious health issues.

So, from that regard it has been stated that injecting in the superficial gluteal seems to be safe as evidence showed that, however despite this, some of the public are still taking risky approaches for the Brazilian butt lifts, by going abroad without considering those raised risks like infection and sepsis and abscess formation that mandate hospital intervention.

Sepsis is a very dangerous and serious condition, especially if it affects the whole body, as it can lead to multiple organ failure. Also, poor techniques can lead to deep venous thrombosis (DVT), pulmonary embolism, fat necrosis, and skin necrosis. On the other hand, liposuction is not as simple as many think and also has a rate of post-operative complications as well as non-surgical procedures like for instance fillers and the celebrity 'Liquid Brazilian Butt Lift' procedure (liquid BBLs). Liquid BBLs involve injecting hyaluronic acid and dermal fillers into the buttocks, and are promoted as risk-free for only a few pounds and able to be performed in as little as 60 minutes.

Overall complications include wound disruption, venous thromboembolism, and necrosis and the contour may be uneven and irregular, or there will be leaking of serous fluid leading to seroma, or blood may accumulate under the skin causing haematoma, skin conditions like wound dehiscence, and necrosis and the fatal systemic complication can be embolism whereby the fat travels down to the lung and lodges there. Other common risks are sepsis and necrotic fasciitis, perforation of intra-abdominal organs.

The incidence of these complaints is not clear, as some are still unreported. However, the reported cases can vary from 2.6 to 20,600 per hundred thousand population and there is no standard technique or analysis to understand the underpinning complications which can be critical, in order, to improve the safety procedures and manage the risks when raised, especially when it comes to the popular procedures given that most are taking place in an ambulatory setting where scarce data are available.

Also, it has been stated that anyone with high body mass index (BMI), as well as liposuction itself, are well-established risks for clotting. This finding isn't new and aligns with previous literature. Also, any prolonged surgical time will be associated with more post-operative complications, including breast augmentation, abdominoplasty, or any other surgery that involves invasion, especially if it involves multiple operations or longer incisions, which would increase the chance of wound dehiscence and other disruptions of the surgical wounds. One study conducted by Pazmino and Garcia showed a high number of deaths were associated with the Brazilian butt lifts which highlights the danger of the procedure (1).

According to the British association of aesthetic plastic surgeons there were 27,465 cosmetic procedures that took place in 2024 with a 5% rise from 2023, and with 94% performed only in women, and the commonest were body contouring including liposuction, abdominoplasty, thigh lifts - which are among the most popular procedures however facial rejuvenations such as facial and neck lift, brow lift, and eyelid surgery have increased and have surged since 2023 (1).

**Figure 1: facial and neck lift, brow lift, and eyelid surgery have been surging since 2023.**



Risk factors are very important to consider for any procedure with long hours in surgery, like body contouring, liposuction, tummy tucks, and fat grafting which all involve long hours under general anaesthesia, which has its own.

Additionally, in many instances, the outcome can be unexpected, and is often unpleasant to the patient, who walks away unhappy and disappointed.

Also, fat removal from one area and injection into another area can lead to uneven body contour, bumps and lumps, and skin surface irregularities, which, of course, will worsen as the body ages.

All surgeries carry complications which are often downplayed or misunderstood by those requesting these procedures, and they will manifest sooner or later. They can be minor, like infection, scarring, or a life-threatening condition, like organ failure or pulmonary embolism.

The post-COVID time has witnessed a tendency to form clots as COVID in itself is known to increase that propensity with minor symptoms or they can be asymptomatic.

Some patients will wake up after the operation confused, disoriented, or with lingering neurological symptoms.

Certain procedures related to the nose, such as rhinoplasty, where the nose is reshaped, may incur difficulties and those undergoing the procedures often have unrealistic expectations. It carries a low satisfaction rate. The cases where the breasts are enlarged and reshaped can come with a high rate of dissatisfaction, and when it comes to implant themselves, they can rupture, deflate, or harden and contracture, and become asymmetrical (2).

Additionally, a concern has arisen about the association of certain implant types and a rare breast implant-associated anaplastic large lymphoma.

Even if the surgery is 'successful', the patient can still walk away unhappy with the outcome. And as we age and the body keeps aging (2). Those procedures might look initially 'brilliant', but may quickly become distorted, and the body, as we know, keeps changing with time, with the aging process, and skin loses its elasticity, fat shifts, and there's nothing that can be done to reverse time.

The troubling thing is that there is no consistent form of regulation, especially nowadays, when many are promoting non-surgical treatment, whether by a trained doctor, or self-taught beautician or 'beauty influencers', or cosmetic tourism, which has risen to multiple layers of complexity.

Many nowadays travel abroad for cheaper and promoted types of operations, whereby the package includes offers of accommodation and transportation as part of the deal, and when patients come back home, they will have limited resources and support if something goes wrong under certain conditions.

Also, when it comes to nonsurgical procedures most are promoted as safe. We know the most common types are Botox and fillers, which are in high demand but that doesn't mean that they are risk-free. The modern hyaluronic acid injection is generally safer than the older version of silicone and can be reversed; however, it can cause granuloma if it becomes infected with certain resistant kinds of bacteria. For the Botox injection it can cause paralysis, nerve damage, or uneven facial results.

Fixation with a youthful beautiful façade has become humdrum in modern society, and has resulted in an upsurge in cosmetic procedures trying to reverse the aging process.

Unrealistic expectations and procedures that cannot turn back time are something we need to think thoroughly about, to save excessive spending and unpleasant disappointments.

## Conclusion

In today's world, beauty often equates to social value, pushing many to undergo cosmetic enhancements, sometimes at great risk. Thus, surgery can act as a vehicle for identity and self-expression, and can be empowering for many people, especially those under the spotlight, to gain their confidence in their appearances and their skin; however, to alter the outlook should be subtle and light, and it is vital to approach such surgery with informed caution. The procedure of beautifying can become horrifying or uglifying or disfiguring which is a real and unpredictable outcome in many instances (Figure 1). In some situations, the consequences can be dramatic and permanent, and irreversible.

After all, natural ageing is inevitable, imminent, and no surgery can fully stop its effects or reverse it, although in many instances, we are bombarded with information otherwise. However, subtle, safe choices should be encouraged over drastic changes, with a stronger focus on regulation, education, and realistic expectations. Beauty should enhance, not endanger or disfigure.

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