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Examining a Plastic Society:

The Aesthetics and Ideology of Beauty, Perfection, and Plasticity as Depicted In the Television Series Nip/ Tuck

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Kathryn Pauly Morgan (1991) writes:

> In Western industrialized societies, women have become increasingly socialized into an acceptance of technical knives. We know about knives that can heal: the knife that saves the life of a baby in distress, the knife that cuts out cancerous growths in our breasts, the knife that straightens our spines, the knife that liberates our arthritic fingers so that we may once again gesture, once again touch, once again hold. But we also know about other knives: the knife that cuts off our toes so that our feet will fit into elegant shoes, the knife that cuts out ribs to fit our bodies into corsets, the knife that slices through our labia in episiotomies and other forms of genital mutilation, the knife that cuts into our abdomens to remove our ovaries to cure our 'deviant tendencies,' the knife that removes our breasts in prophylactic or unnecessary radical mastectomies, the knife that cuts out our 'useless bag,' if we're the wrong color and poor, if we've 'outlived our fertility,' the knife that makes the 'bikini cut,' across our pregnant bellies to facilitate the cesarean section that will allow the obstetrician to go on holiday. We know these knives well. And now, we are coming to know the knives and needles of the cosmetic surgeon—the knives that promise to sculpt our bodies, to restore our youth, to create beauty out of what was ugly and ordinary. What kind of knives are these? Magic knives. (p. 32)

In the post-modern, Western world the feminine standards of beauty are undergoing a dramatic shift in the socially constructed perception of the idealized embodiment of feminine perfection. With the technological advances in the field of cosmetic plastic surgery, the Western standards for feminine beauty are being nipped and tucked away from the eighteenth century canons of femininity, as practiced in the fine arts, to reveal a post-modern plastic façade of cosmetically altered female beauty. The field of elective cosmetic surgery is a significant cultural site because

of its rapidly growing popularity among Western women, and moreover, under critical examination speaks about contemporary cultural experiences of the aesthetics and ideology in regards to post-modern standards for feminine beauty. In contemporary culture, women today now more openly embrace surgical means to achieve the embodiment of feminine perfection—a reality made possible by the thriving cosmetic plastic surgery industry. While the field of plastic surgery provides potential patients with pleasure and escapism from ugliness and imperfection, it is in turn rooted in several ideological issues concerned with the plasticity of Western society. By examining cultural superficiality through a perfection-flawless dualism it becomes clear that these ideological themes are congruently embedded within the larger social context, which begs to question ethics and morality within medicine.

According to Morgan (1991), the field of elective cosmetic surgery is experiencing a growth in popularity and a *normalization* in the Western world. McCabe (1990), writes that for many women it is no longer a question of whether or not to go under the knife, but rather for what type of procedure and when. Morgan believes that the industry is undergoing an ideological shift "out of the domain of the sleazy, the suspicious, the secretively deviant, or the pathologically narcissistic, *it is becoming the norm*" (p. 28). In other words, Western women no longer contemplate fetishizing their bodies because now they can buy beauty. The type of beauty that masquerades under the guise of restored youth and aesthetic bodily perfection—a façade of plasticity. Davis (1991) writes that, "cosmetic plastic surgery is regarded as slightly frivolous, yet a woman who wants to change her appearance by surgical means will find herself heaving to justify her decision with accounts of extreme suffering" (p. 24). Elective cosmetic surgical procedures are becoming the normative solution among individuals within the female

population who are in some manner dissatisfied with their given body, all of which is explored in the FX television series titled Nip/ Tuck.

Definition

Nip/ Tuck is an American Emmy and Golden Globe winning television series created by Executive Producer Ryan Murphy (Internet Movie Database [IMDb], 2009). The series follows the format of a medical drama, which examines the lives of two plastic surgeons working in Miami Beach, Florida. It is an envelope pushing, over-the-top, unorthodox, graphic television show. In other words, according to the series slogan Nip/ Tuck is "a disturbingly perfect drama series" (FX Network [FX], 2009). The plastic surgery drama stars several well-respected actors including: Dylan Walsh (Dr. Sean McNamara), Julian McMahon (Dr. Christian Troy), Roma Maffia (Dr. Liz Cruz), and Joely Richardson (Julia McNamara), all of whom work to bring a believability to the world of plastic surgery. The world which Morgan deems "the pathologically narcissistic" field of plastic surgery (1991, p. 28). Nip/ Tuck has been nominated for Emmy Awards in categories ranging from Outstanding Prosthetic Make-Up to Outstanding Art Direction for a Single Camera Series, annually from the years 2004-2008. In 2004, the series won the Emmy for Outstanding Make-Up for a Series, Miniseries or a Special, in the category of prosthetics[1]. In an interview Executive Producer Ryan Murphy stated that

> I wanted to do a depthy show about superficiality. That was always my one line pitch. I wanted to do a show that looked very glamorous and then underneath you would see the rot and how dastardly, dark, and how depressing that world is (Murphy, 2003).

[1] Prosthetics is defined as a branch of medicine dealing with the design, production, and use of artificial body parts, however, in this context refers to the medical props used in the series Nip/ Tuck to recreate dramatizations of specific plastic surgery procedures.

In other words, Nip/ Tuck plunges the viewer into a world where superficiality reigns supreme. In this world one is able to "nip" and "tuck" away imperfection and ugliness manifested in bodily unhappiness with the painful, quick fix approach of cosmetic plastic surgery.

Series Context—Grounded in Post-modern Aesthetics

Nip/ Tuck portrays the field of plastic surgery in a shameless and unapologetic manner; more specifically in the way it portrays human beings and their decisions to undergo cosmetic plastic surgery. The television series explores the way people, mainly women, are externalizing their self-hatred by choosing to undergo what Morgan (1991) calls the "magic knife" of plastic surgery. According to Executive Producer Greer Shepard, Nip/ Tuck is a series that examines "how people decide to fix their interior problems by making external corrections" (Murphy, 2003). In fact, as a series Nip/ Tuck is immersed in exploring the cultural aesthetics and ideology of cosmetic plastic surgery at every level. For instance, Nip/ Tuck's introductory theme song titled "A Perfect Lie," demonstrates how the series consistently weaves the ideologies of plasticity, perfection and beauty together to reinforce the superficiality of Western social standards for feminine beauty. Each episode begins with the following lyrics by the Engine Room (2003):

Make me, beautiful

Make me, beautiful

Perfect soul,

Perfect mind,

Perfect face,

A perfect… lie.

The lyrics, although simple in diction, are poignant in terms of their message. The theme song is a commentary on the world of cosmetic plastic surgery. The lyrics bring viewer attention to the notion that through artificial bodily modification and alteration a woman can achieve beauty and perfection, however, this beauty and perfection are in actuality perfect lies. Bahm (1947) writes:

> The term 'pleasure' means pleasant feeling. There is no beauty apart from pleasant feeling. Feelings are subjective, so all beauty is subjective. Since intrinsic value consists in pleasant feeling, all beauty has, or is, intrinsic value. To be 'objectified' is to be subjective but to seem objective. Beauty is not real, yet it seems to be real. Thus beauty involves illusion in this sense. (p. 582)

Ultimately, cosmetic surgical results are artificial and therefore a misleading façade. These perfect lies are sewn deep into the television series and subliminally impress onto viewers the question of whether or not cosmetic surgical enhancements are real. In fact, through Nip/ Tuck's photography and camera work, the visual aesthetics of the series cause the viewer to continually question what is perfection—ultimately question the embodiment of feminine perfection. Nip/ Tuck asks the viewer to evaluate whether these ideologies are in truth perfect lies as suggested by the themes song lyrics.

Moreover, Nip/ Tuck is a series created on a platform of surgical factuality and the painfully brutal realities of cosmetic plastic surgery. The storylines are inspired by actual surgical cases that have been preformed worldwide, which become a stage for reaching out to the audience. Nip/ Tuck is ultimately a commentary on popular cultures' obsession with cosmetic plastic surgery, which then dramatically investigates the industries *normalization* (Morgan, 1991). According to the FX official Nip/ Tuck website, writers for the series include both males

and females who range in age from their thirties to several in their fifties. The writing team for the series also encompasses individuals from varying personal backgrounds, all of who bring a mix of experiences to the show. Series writers include individuals who are both gay and straight, single and married, parents and soon to be parents, which results in a unique pool of varied experiences. These experiences are therefore rooted in truth and easily become relative to a large expanse of viewers.

For instance, throughout its five seasons on-air, each episode of Nip/ Tuck centers on documented, real-life cases of surgical operations and cosmetic procedures, which bring a sense of reality to the dramatic series. The list includes but is not limited to the following cosmetic operations: Augmentation Mammoplasty (breast augmentation), Abdominoplasty (tummy tuck), Rhytidectomy (face lift), Blepharoplasty (eye lid lift), Rhinoplasty (nose reshaping), Otoplasty (ear reshaping), Lipoplasty (liposuction), Brachioplasty (arm lift), Labiaplasty (labia reshaping), brow lift, and etc (Murphy, 2003). Although Nip/ Tuck focuses on these normalized cosmetic procedures the series story lines have also included several more extreme cases, which often times resulted in viewer-network controversy.

In other words, Nip/ Tuck is in the very canon of what everyday people do, however, in the television show they are overtly dramatized and made into a nighttime soap opera. According to Executive Producer Ryan Murphy, "it is really a series about making choices in your life and the consequences based on those choices" (2003). The types of choices Morgan believes "entail the ultimate envelopment of lived temporal *reality* of the human subject by technologically created appearances that are then regarded as real" (1991, p. 28). The technologically created appearance more often results in the triumph of youthful appearance over aged reality. Today, this surgically achieved triumph over reality is more commonplace in

Western society than in previous decades. In fact, according to Morgan as of 1990, the top three most frequently performed cosmetic procedures are: liposuction—a procedure in which fat cells are sucked out from underneath the skin using vacuum devices, breast augmentation—a surgical procedure which involves the insertion of implants, and finally the facelift—an umbrella term plastic surgeons use to describe any cosmetic alterations to the facial area. According to Davis (1991), cosmetic plastic surgery is a multimillion-dollar industry, where more than half a million operations are performed annually in the United States alone.

Audience

Nip/ Tuck premiered in July 2003, and was broadcast on American cable's FX Network during the Tuesday, 10:00 P.M. time slot (FX, 2009). FX, for Fox eXtended, is the name of a number of related subscription TV channels owned by News Corporation's Fox Entertainment Group. Each Nip/ Tuck episode has an on-air running time of forty-five minutes, with season premiers and finales running longer at sixty minutes each. Nip/ Tuck's television debut of Episode One ("Pilot") attracted a high percentage of viewers, and since then has continued to rapidly grow in popularity and viewer loyalty. The pilot episode drew in a total of 3.7 million viewers, of which 2.0 million were between the ages of 18-49 (FX, 2009). In fact, according to the official FX Network website, in its debut season Nip/ Tuck was the highest-rated new series on American basic cable, and after five seasons and eight-one episodes became the highest rated basic cable series of all time for the 18-49 age demographics. A survey of several popular Nip/ Tuck blogs and fan sites[2] demonstrate viewer's high opinions and enthusiasm for the series.

These fan-created sites describe the series using the following adjectives: intense, dramatic, disturbing, chaotic, haunting, beautiful, grotesque, visceral, and leaky. Put differently, Executive Producer Michael M. Robin describes Nip/ Tuck as "a fresh ground for story telling in terms of plastic surgery which really allows for madness to occur in a way that is plausible" (Murphy, 2003).

Relevance to Popular Culture—Post-Modern Appeals

As a nighttime television series, Nip/ Tuck is deeply in tune and grounded in popular culture. The series can be interpreted as a post-modern commentary of current trends in Western popular culture including music, style/ fashion, and celebrity status. In my mind, Nip/ Tuck is one of the most culturally relevant shows on television today. The series is all about popularity—Nip/ Tuck lives and breathes popular culture, which is perhaps one reference point for its large fan base and following. In other words, Nip/ Tuck's ability to tap into popular culture and saturate each season with commentaries of current society is the vehicle by which the series attracts large numbers of viewers. For instance, each episode of Nip/ Tuck has its own, individually selected and composed soundtrack, which is tied by theme to the ideologies discussed during the on-air period. In each of the eighty-one episodes, the plastic surgeons of the McNamara/ Troy Clinic listen to a different song while performing the various cosmetic operations. For example, in the episode titled "Montana, Sassy, Justice" a young woman with multiple personality disorder is undergoing surgery for her "cankles"—more commonly

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[2] The series popularity has inspired a variety of fan created internet forums, chat rooms, discussion boards, and blogs included but are not limited to the following examples: www.niptuckfans.com; www.niptuckforum.com; www.fxniptuck.blogspot.com; and etc. These cultural sites are a place where fans gather to discuss the television show.

described as fat ankles (FX, 2009). During her surgery the musical selection in the operating room is "Hot Legs" by Rod Stewart, which brings a sense of lightness and comedy into the seriousness of the drama. Not only is Nip/ Tuck utilizing current music selection as a means to attract their viewers, but the series also keeps up with current style/ fashion trends as another vehicle to attract its audience.

For instance, in the series each main character, which includes the two protagonists Dr. Sean McNamara and Dr. Christian Troy, are all portrayed as being fashion forward and trendy. This is especially true of Dr. Christian Troy who throughout the series wears the trendiest Gucci suits, drives the flashiest and most expensive Lamborghini sport cars, dines on hip foods including sushi and wheatgrass infused teas, and most importantly is shown spending quality time at the most exclusive Miami establishments populated by beautiful people. Moreover, not only are the characters of Nip/ Tuck on the leading edge of today's style/ fashion, but the overall aesthetic look of the show is as well. The sets are designed using clean, modernist props and décor. Sleek and cool, the aesthetic appeal of Nip/ Tuck is designed after a specific aesthetic appeal Executive Producers coined "tropical modernism" (Murphy, 2003). Using clean and minimalist lines Murphy pays homage to Paul Schrader's 1980 film *American Gigolo*. In the season one DVD director commentary Murphy (2003) states:

> In terms of the look of Nip/ Tuck, I was very specific about a sort of concept called tropical modernism. This aesthetic look quickly became our jumping off point for the look of the series. It's very clean, it's very minimalist, it's very in that sort of Paul Schrader, *American Gigolo*, early 1980s style that I grew up with and loved. I wanted blood reds, blacks, and really crisp whites, navy blues—there are no pastels allowed in the show. It is what I termed a chroma-nior approach to visual story telling—big

> splashes of color contrasted with very deep, shadowy elements, which were element in the script and translated visually through the use of photography and lighting. (Season One DVD Extras)

These concepts and approaches of aesthetic visual story telling help set the stage for Nip/ Tuck's visceral, haunting, and unapologetic story lines in order to illustrate and heighten the female obsession of attaining the peak of feminine beauty as it is currently defined in Western popular culture. With this, Nip/ Tuck becomes the ideal site for exploring the ideology of the plasticity of society through a lens of superficiality and the perfection-flawless dualism, which are sewn deep into every level of the series. Moreover, these socially shaped ideologies go to bed with Western societies current struggle with the ethics and morals surrounding the normalization of cosmetic plastic surgery. In this struggle the field moves away from the ideological domains of sleaziness and deviancy toward becoming the normative solution for bodily displeasure for Western females. In other words Nip/ Tuck becomes a visual manifestation of the "body as a battlefield" (Simonsen, 2000, p. 7).

Ideology of a Plastic Society—A Lens of Superficiality

Nip/ Tuck is a television series that examines the plasticity of Western society—plasticity in the form of aesthetic bodily superficiality. From the basic premise the series is all about skin. It explores the skin of feminine perfection and how it is achieved through the technological colonization of the female body through the invasive means of cosmetic plastic surgery. The term superficial is defined as of, relating to, or located near the surface (www.merriam-webster.com). Etymologically the word superficiality is derived from the Late Latin *superficialis*, or *superficies* meaning "surface," from *super* "above, over" (www.merriam-

webster.com). In other words, the notion of superficiality is concerned with the obvious or apparent—what is seen on the surface. In the case of Nip/ Tuck it is an obsession with the embodiment of feminine aesthetic perfection. In this series, superficiality becomes the lens through which the viewer examines the post-modern standards for aesthetic perfection by questing beauty. What is beauty? And, moreover, how is beauty defined in a plastic, post-modern Western society?

As individual human beings, we each have our own distinct ideas, standards, perceptions, and personal definitions for feminine beauty. One's individualized interpretation of what he or she considers beautiful differs among individuals, yet these standards share a common link. Our individualized definitions are influenced, altered, and shaped by socially constructed ideologies, which define not only what the standard is but also how it should look. For example, in eighteenth century paintings robust women were considered to embody the aesthetic standard of feminine perfection. Artists Jean-Honore Fragonard and Francois Boucher propagated the French, Rocco vision of feminine beauty through their works. This eighteenth century beauty was engorged with a novelty feminine sensuality, attained through the exaggeration of the form. Today however, the socially accepted definition of beauty is redefined by the post-modern interpretation of female aesthetic perfection. Currently, in Western culture beauty and sexiness are associated with new social standards. For instance, it seems that in Western culture the voluptuous and curvaceous female of the eighteenth century is no longer idealized. For now, rather than the full-figured female, societal standards have shifted to idolize females with physical traits including thin, nearly emaciated frames and mile long legs—more of what one could see parading down the high fashion catwalks of Paris. Society influences one to accept this barely-there, waif of the female form as being the embodiment of feminine perfection. It is

what Davis calls the "oppressive cultural constraints on women to be beautiful—a false consciousness" (1991, p. 22). Yet, these standards of feminine beauty are shaped by superficial ways of defining the ideal. Therefore, superficiality is the social construction and mentality of flawlessness. However, to fully understand this aesthetic superficiality it is important to examine the difference between perfection and flawlessness. Through an examination of the perfection-flawless dualism one is able to understand why the field of cosmetic plastic surgery has grown tremendously since the late 1990s (Morgan, 1991).

As a series Nip/ Tuck deals with societal obsessions of achieving bodily aesthetic perfection. This obsession is culturally misinterpreted with the desire to achieve a state of aesthetic flawlessness, and, therefore becomes problematic. The word perfection is derived from the Latin *perfection* and *perfectio*, from *perficere* (www.merriam-webster.com). These expressions in term come from *perfectio,* which means to finish and bring to an end. Perfection is defined as a state of completeness. Often times, Western society is misguided when speaking about attaining aesthetic perfection through cosmetic plastic surgery. Achieving perfection entails becoming a whole, attaining a state of completeness. Therefore perfection is attainable in certain regards, however aesthetic perfection is not attainable. To achieve a state of aesthetic perfection would suggest flawlessness, yet perfection does not imply flawlessness. In other words, the field of cosmetic plastic surgery serves "to channel women's energies in the hopeless race for a perfect body" (Davis, 1991, p. 25).

Today, in a Western, post-modern world plastic surgery is rapidly becoming the quick fix solution many unhappy and aesthetically dissatisfied women seek to achieve that unattainable state of aesthetic flawlessness. According to Davis (1991), "women's preoccupation with their appearance is viewed as part of a complex of structured social practices, variously referred to as

the politics of appearance" (p. 25). The surgical quest for aesthetic bodily flawlessness among the female population is rapidly growing. For instance, female high school graduates now receive breast augmentation surgeries as graduation gifts (Simonsen, 2000). The reward for scholastic achievement is now more commonly granted in the form of surgical enhancements, moving the recipient into a realm where bodily preoccupation dominates over the mind. With this, Western society continues to repress the Kantian, modernist tradition of aesthetics "founded as it was on the deliberate suppression of the body and the privileging of mindful activity" (Duncum, 2008, p. 124). In fact, in a post-modern Western society where cosmetic plastic surgery is reality, females no longer espouse the modernist interpretation of aesthetics that "represented a denial of the body and elevating of the mind" (Duncum, 2005, p. 10). This obsession with bodily cosmetic alteration is trickling down to a quickly growing, youthful female population. The cosmetic surgery fad is no long sacred to the elite upper class women of the bourgeois, but rather, through the process Morgan (1991) calls normalization is indeed becoming more attainable for females of other social classes to take part in as well. Pearlman (1954) writes:

> Many years ago, there was a saying that 'handsome is as handsome does.' The adage does not stand up well to the test. It seems that the feeling of being handsome, or at least 'adequate,' is indispensable to many people's personal, social, and business success. (p. 618)

In other words, the need to validate oneself through cosmetic alterations to achieve a state of complete happiness and success is perhaps a reason why many utilize plastic surgery as a crutch for achieving that success.

On the obverse, flawlessness is something that is unattainable. Western society does however propagate the desire to achieve aesthetic flawlessness. The notion of aesthetic flawlessness in my mind is closely tied with the modernist aesthetics of the Kantian tradition. According to Duncum (2008), the Kantian tradition sought to separate out aesthetics from ethics. Sturken and Cartwright (2001) write:

> Kant believed that pure beauty could be found in nature and art, and that it is universal rather than specific to a particular culture of individual codes. In other words, he felt that certain things inevitably and objectively are beautiful. (p. 48)

Put differently, "Kantian good taste was grounded in bourgeois disgust and horror at vulgar pleasures" (Duncum, p. 124). Duncum asserts, "aesthetic perfection in the Kantian tradition meant the rejection of the unpleasant, crude, and rude—and instead focused solely on the pleasant and the sublime" (p. 124). This rejection of the vulgar is clearly addressed in the television series Nip/ Tuck. Each of the eighty-one episodes revolve around story lines that depict mainly female patients, who, in a sense seek to revert to the Kantian traditions of aesthetics by undergoing painful cosmetic plastic surgery, however they are misinterpreting this tradition. These patients are at the McNamara/ Troy plastic surgery clinic for superficial aesthetic reasons, ultimately rejecting what they perceive as "vulgar"—a wrinkle, extra fat, a bump on their nose, and etc. In the series, such female patients are depicted as being blinded by superficiality and a desire to fit into Western standards of aesthetic perfection. This closely mirrors the reality of the situation for Western women who feel the need to superficially, through surgical enhancements, strive to achieve the Kantian premise of the beautiful and sublime.

Moreover, during the eighteenth century Alexander Baumgarten furthered Descartes mind/body dualism by bringing, "what he called the 'the sensuous discourse' of aesthetics into

being as a separate and distinct branch of philosophy" (Duncum, 2005, p. 10). Duncum (2007) writes, "Baumgarten believed the world could be understood principally through internal workings of the mind, but reasoning showed him the importance of feelings, imagination and sensory experience" (p. 11). The interplay of these internal workings of the mind with feelings, imagination, and sensory experience unite to create what Duncum (2007) terms the aesthetics of embodiment.

Embodiment as defined by Duncum, "refers to the perceptual experience and [a] mode of presence and engagement with the world" (2007, p. 9). With embodiment there exists, "an appeal straight to the central nervous system," which includes an appeal to the visceral and vulgar (Duncum, 2005, p. 9). In the series Nip/ Tuck, this embodiment harkens back to the cultural practices associated with the medieval carnival (Duncum & Springgay, 2007). Duncum and Springgay explain that "medieval carnivals embraced ritual spectacles" which included the vulgar and grotesque body (p. 1145). Langman writes, the "carnival is a time of ironic inversions and reversals of the 'normal' hierarchies" (2003, p. 78). This inversion of "normal" hierarchies is evident in the series Nip/ Tuck. The television drama juxtaposes the ideologies of beauty and attractiveness, views that represent notions of satisfaction, happiness, and excessiveness with the feelings of unattractiveness and repulsiveness, which symbolizes a woman's choice to undergo cosmetic plastic surgery. This juxtaposition now becomes ironic because these women no longer represent completeness or perfection, but rather, embody the ugliness of striving to achieve a state of flawlessness. In fact, this juxtaposition may in turn cause those women who seek flawlessness via the surgeons' knife to paradoxically become the embodiment of vulgarity. In their quest to achieve an embodied state of aesthetic flawlessness

they indeed move farther away from a state of completeness, and instead move toward a carnivelesque body of perfect lies.

Bakhtin defines the carnival body as, "bulging, protuberant, and complete with emphasis on the openings and orifices" (Duncum & Springgay, 2007, p. 1145). This carnivelesque body is clearly evident in the television series Nip/ Tuck, where the writers and producers deliberately portray for viewers the violence and brutality associated with cosmetic surgery procedures. The brutality of such operations is heightened with visually graphic portrayals of the post-op healing process, which involves leaky and visceral wounds that bleed, puss, and engorge with inflammation. It is an example of what Bakhtin regards as an *open* or *extreme* body within the history of fine art (Duncum, & Springgay, p. 1143). This *extreme* body according to Duncum and Springgay is, "leaky and visceral, an image of extreme pain and wounding" (p. 1143). The classic art body, which embodied beauty and the sublime, is noticeably absent and instead the viewer is presented with, "an image of extreme pain" (Duncum & Springgay, p. 1143).

As a medical drama series, Nip/ Tuck embraces the vulgar and carnivelesque in a manner which echoes another historic practice known as the "archetypal 'cabinet of curiosity' or *Wunderkammer*" (Duncum & Springgay, 2007, p. 1144). Duncum and Springgay (2007) write that:

> The "cabinets of curiosity" functioned as a disordered jumble of unconnected objects, many of which were body parts or objects identified with bodies and identities. The cabinets functioned to present and represent knowledge of the world. Their allure was in displaying "the extreme" in a civilized and controlled environment, thereby ensuring domination over the objects (and the bodies they represented) while simultaneously privileging the strange(r) as the exotic other. (p. 1144)

In the case of Nip/ Tuck, the series revisits the historic *Wunderkammer*. The television show presents worldly knowledge, specifically ideologies about the painfully brutal world of cosmetic plastic surgery, in juncture with the idea of aesthetic perfection, or that of being complete. It is however, ironic that women who choose the knife as their road to reaching completeness, end up being torn apart, made full of holes, and then sewn back together to immediately reveal a swollen body. The series Nip/ Tuck creates a display of the extreme, through a controlled, and safe television art environment, which allows for viewers to examine the ugliness of cosmetic plastic surgery at a safe distance.

Final Thoughts—Sewing the Wounds Closed

In the post-modern, Western world the feminine standards of beauty are undergoing a dramatic shift in the socially constructed perception of the idealized embodiment of feminine perfection. With the technological advances in the field of cosmetic plastic surgery, the standards for feminine beauty are being nipped and tucked away from the eighteenth century canons of femininity, as practiced in the fine arts, to reveal a post-modern plastic façade of cosmetically altered beauty. With this shift in contemporary culture, it is important to examine the source of this ideological shift. As a society we should raise questions and critically investigate the world of plastic surgery and its impact and influence on female confidence. Is the normalization of cosmetic plastic surgery beneficial or does the field ultimately cause pain and psychological trauma? Is this normalization healthy? And, most importantly what does this shift in cosmetic plastic surgery imply for the future generations?

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