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**A STUDY OF BODY IMAGE AND COSMETIC SURGERY
AMONG THAI FEMALE BEAUTY PAGEANT CONTESTANTS**

TAVANUN BOONBONGKARN

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บัณฑิตวิทยาลัย มหาวิทยาลัยมหิดล

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In contemporary Thai society, the ideal of beauty emphasizing physical appearance has become prominent due to the mass media. Development of medical technology has made the alteration of one's physical appearance possible. The aim of this study is to examine the process underlying changes in body image relevant to cosmetic surgery among Thai female beauty contestants. This study used qualitative methods, including in-depth interview and observation. The informants were fifteen contestants of the Miss Thailand 2000 beauty contest who were chosen by stratified sampling and who were interviewed by the researcher between November, 2000 and April, 2001. The data was analyzed using line by line content analysis of the transcribed interviews.

The informants were divided into three groups according to their experience in beauty contests: those who participated in more than five contests, those who participated in 2-5 contests, and those who participated in this contest for the first time. In general, the informants in the first group had a negative body image before entering beauty contests. Four out of five participants in this group reported that after cosmetic surgery, the perception of their body image became positive. The informants in the second group had mixed perceptions. Two informants in this group had undergone cosmetic surgery before the contest. They reported that they were satisfied with the results of the surgery and that their body image had shifted from negative to positive. The other three informants in this group were satisfied with their appearance and felt there was no need to undergo cosmetic surgery. In the last group, none of the five informants had undergone cosmetic surgery. All of them felt satisfied with their appearance, and their body image did not change after the contest. Only one of the five informants in this group wanted to have cosmetic surgery after the contest.

In conclusion, it appears that for some beauty contestants, cosmetic surgery changed their body image from negative to positive. Rather than emphasizing physical beauty and cosmetic surgery as a means to achieve this, it is recommended that Thai society, including the mass media and beauty contest industry, place more emphasis on aspects other than physical beauty, such as knowledge and talent.