

New Book Explains Plastic Surgery to Children

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(April 21, 2008) A Florida plastic surgeon has written a book for young children to help them understand why Mommy is having a tummy tuck, nose job, and breast enhancement. Critics say the book raises body image and self-esteem issues, especially for young girls.

My Beautiful Mommy was written by Michael Salzhauer, a Florida plastic surgeon who claims he wrote it in response to the many women he treats in his Bal Harbour Florida office who express concern about how to explain their plastic surgery to children.

“Many parents don't explain to their kids what's going on,” said Salzhauer to the *Associated Press*. A father of four with his fifth child on the way, he said, “Children are very perceptive. You can't hide a major surgery from them. When mom goes down for two weeks after a tummy tuck it affects them.”

He tackled the problem by creating a story for children ages four to seven about a Mom with a crooked nose and loose tummy skin who picks up her daughter from school one day and takes her along on an appointment with a handsome and muscle-bound doctor named “Dr. Michael.”

With Dr. Michael's help, mom is going to get a tummy tuck, nose job and breast implants. She explains to her daughter before the surgery, “You see, as I got older, my body stretched and I couldn't fit into my clothes anymore. Dr. Michael is going to help fix that and make me feel better.”

The little girl asks if it will hurt and mom says, “Maybe a little,” and warns that she's going to look a little different when the bandages come off. “Why are you going to look different?” the little girl asks and Mommy responds, “Not just different, my dear - prettier!”

Mommy comes home from the hospital looking bandaged and bruised and has to “take it easy” for awhile, which explains why grandmom is there to help around the house. But she is soon out of bed and when the big day arrives, she emerges from her bandages looking like a Barbie doll with a new nose, tiny waist, and large breasts.

Strangely, Dr. Salzhauer doesn't mention the breast augmentation in the book, but illustrator Victor Guiza clearly depicts this new addition to Mom's body.

“I tried to skirt that issue in the text itself,” Salzhauer admitted.. “The tummy lends itself to an easy explanation to the children: extra skin and can't fit into your clothes. The breasts might be a stretch for a six-year-old.”

Big Tent Books in Savannah, Georgia plans to have the book ready in time for Mother's Day with an initial printing of 4,400 copies available for purchase only through the company's Web site

Salzhauer says he knows many people will find the book distasteful. “There are people who are going to read this and say you're indoctrinating kids and idealizing beauty. That's not the intention of the book at all. The intention is to allow parents who are going through this process anyway to have a vehicle to explain it to their kids.”

Child psychiatrist Elizabeth Berger, author of *Raising Kids With Character*, told *Newsweek* that because so many women are getting plastic surgery, a book may be needed for children, but this one is incomplete. While it's important to discuss the surgery with a child, the mother in the book should have said something like, “This is silly, but I really want it anyway,” she says. “That is more honest and more helpful to the child.”

She expressed concern about the body image issues raised by cosmetic surgery, especially for daughters. Berger worries that kids will think their own body parts must need “fixing” too. The surgery on a nose, for example, may “convey to the child that the child's nose, which always seemed OK, might be perceived by Mommy or by somebody as unacceptable,” she says.

A 2007 study by the American Psychological Association found that the media's over-emphasis on a woman's physical appearance is having profound negative affects on girls' self-confidence. It makes them uncomfortable with their bodies, which leads to self-image problems as well as feelings of shame and anxiety and has been linked to a variety of problems from eating disorders and low self-esteem to depression in girls. Books such as Salzhauer's, which present the ideal woman as looking more like a Barbie doll than a human being, only introduces this stress-inducing concept to girls at an even younger age.

In addition, it may serve to further desensitize girls to the prospects of plastic surgery. The trend among teens to undergo cosmetic surgery has risen to alarming rates in recent years. According to statistics compiled by the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, 13,699 cosmetic procedures were performed on teens in 1996. Just 10 years later, that number jumped to 244,124.

Salzhauer, who performs about 200 tummy tucks and breast procedures a year, mostly on mothers, says his patients do worry about how their children are going to react to the surgery, and these are the people for whom he wrote the book.

“The book just goes toward trying to make the process as understandable as possible for the kids,” he said, “so they can feel included and don't have to make things up in their minds on what's going on.”

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