

Plastic surgery has led to the objectification of breasts according to social scientist

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Women's breasts have long been the focus of visual attention. Whether interpreted as the ultimate symbol of femininity, or sexualised by the male gaze, breasts are an integral part of a woman's body, which are increasingly becoming a commodity according to Dr Jacqueline Sanchez Taylor, Lecturer in the University of Leicester's Department of Sociology.

The [plastic surgery](#) industry continues to grow and breast augmentations remain a popular procedure as women strive for the perfect body. In 2012, 11,135 procedures for breast augmentations were undertaken in the UK, a 13 per cent increase from the previous year. The ability to buy and sell breasts in such a way positions them as a marketable object similar to other fashion items for consumption, according to Dr Sanchez Taylor who will be discussing her ideas in a public lecture on Tuesday 4 November.

Dr Sanchez Taylor explained: "The market for breast augmentation surgery has highlighted a number of interesting questions for sociologists. First about the demand for [cosmetic surgery](#) and medical consumption and second, about the morality of consuming breast augmentations as objects and what this tells us about how our society understands femininity."

Cosmetic surgery bridges the gap of two areas of consumption which are traditionally very separate: medicine and beauty/fashion. This positioning enables the procedure to be trivialised and sold as a beauty

treatment, rather than a medical intervention and a major surgery.

Dr Sanchez Taylor notes how the objectification of breasts allows the industry to talk about 'sagging' breasts, 'mis-shapen' breasts, and 'small' breasts, as problems which can be altered and repaired with medical treatment. She also points to the normalisation of cosmetic surgery which distances itself from other medical procedures.

She added: "The cosmetic surgery industry sells breast augmentations as aids to increase self-confidence, self-esteem and as fashion accessories. In this context, more women are thinking of their breasts as fashion/status/feminising objects which can be reshaped and changed at will.

"If this trend continues, then breasts will increasingly come to be viewed as objects, 'things', commodities that can be owned."

Provided by University of Leicester

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