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**Aphrodite's Bosom: An analysis of how breast
augmentation is constructed at the site of cosmetic
surgery websites in New Zealand**

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Abstract

Cosmetic surgery, such as breast augmentation is made possible by the intersections of dominant understandings and practices of gender, medicine, and consumerism. In contemporary western world societies, the female breast is increasingly drawn into medicalized processes of commodification. Through practices of breast augmentation, the breast is able to be exchanged and transformed. The breast as a commodity is understood and (re)produced as a cultural object of femininity. Dominant understandings of femininity not only shape constructions of subjectivities for women, but also act to normalize other social arrangements, and practices of gender, embodiment, medicine, and consumption. This study provides an analysis of the discursive understandings that surround practices of breast augmentation, at the site of cosmetic surgery websites in New Zealand. The World Wide Web is a key knowledge technology and marketplace, and provides an important source through which processes of breast augmentation are represented. In an analysis of texts on New Zealand websites for cosmetic surgery, two representations of breast augmentation were identified, 'breast augmentation as solution' and 'breast augmentation as choice'. Breast augmentation was represented as a solution to small or 'problematic breasts' and a loss of femininity and self-esteem, and as a choice of self determination for women. Together these representations indicated that processes of breast augmentation hold in place dominant notions of femininity. These notions of femininity were drawn upon to construct women as their bodies, and their bodies as idealized objects. Notions of this ideal female breast and body were further and authoritatively held in place by the male, and medicalized knowledges of the cosmetic surgeons in these representations of breast augmentation. These notions of femininity reproduced in these websites representations were employed to limit possibilities of choice, for breast implant size, shape and position for women in practices of breast augmentation. These representations were understood, and discussed for what they may mean for women as well as in relation to wider social understandings, and relationships in contemporary New Zealand society.

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