

# Buttock surgery is also a feminist issue

Cosmetic surgery is a menace to society on the level of environmental pollution, says **Susie Orbach**. It's time to respect women's bodies as a precious resource

**H**as feminism lost the fight on cosmetic surgery? I thought of this question as I watched the news yesterday about Claudia Aderotimi, a 20-year-old student from East London who died after surgery to enlarge her buttocks. It's a question that needs a different kind of answer, a surprising answer that has been rethought for the 21st century. I first started writing, thinking and campaigning on these kinds of issues back in the 1970s. It's been more than 30 years since I wrote *Fat is a Feminist Issue*. At the time, the pressure was on women to reshape their bodies through dieting. I'm afraid that I did not anticipate the cosmetic industry chipping in with the knife. Over the years I have watched in horror as this new grisly culture took hold. Back then, I was aware that occasionally people had nose jobs. Next, it was movie stars altering themselves. Now it's everywhere: girls get breast implants as their sweet 16 present, or bridesmaids are honoured with the right to cosmetic surgery before

the wedding. The propaganda of the cosmetic surgery industry has been so successful and so insidious, the public believes that operations are something useful that you can pop out and do in your lunch hour, like a haircut. Well, here we are, another woman has died needlessly. What happened to Claudia Aderotimi is just the tip of the iceberg. Hers is the tragic story that we get to hear about, but the fact that women and girls routinely reshape their body through surgery is now seen as perfectly acceptable. It's only when it goes wrong that you realise that this isn't fun, glamorous or a game. It's a form of violence. Is it depressing to still be writing about this subject 30 years on? Yes. Is it depressing to see that, after a lifetime working on trying to change the debate, even more pressures are being put on young women such as Aderotimi and a new generation of girls? Of course it is, it is very upsetting. At the same time as women are getting more and more confident in the world, there is a diminishing of their bodies. As women try to take their place in society, they are told they will not fit in, they need the help of these procedures. I don't think that it's a conscious link "let's attack women because they're taking up more space in the world". But there has been a much closer association with women's bodies as part of their work. We are on show all the time, whether we are a lawyer or a journalist. Our appearance is absolutely critical. On the one hand we have women having fat sucked out to stop their bum looking so big, on the other women having implants so their bum can look bigger. Flesh is sucked and squeezed in different places. We are styling the body as if it were a piece of putty rather than the place we live in. That is why it is time for a different way of thinking on cosmetic surgery, which aligns it with one of the biggest and most influential global campaigns of the modern era. All this effort on cosmetic surgery, all this cost, risk and time, is a great big waste. Wasteful in the same way that so many multi-million pound industries pollute our planet.



Take, as an example, my daughter. When she was a teenager, all her friends were absolutely gorgeous. There was a lovely aspect to them dressing up and looking nice, it was great for them to enjoy their beauty. Some of them were minuscule, some were Amazonian. They all fretted that they didn't look exactly the same. Understandable, maybe, if it was their hair, but their bodies? For their bodies to conform to the latest fashionable template was an impossible idea. Sure, they could beat themselves up trying. But it was not sustainable.

**Clockwise from top: Claudia Aderotimi; the hotel in Philadelphia where she died; Aderotimi, centre, with her band Chocolatz, her home in Hoxton, East London**



seen that the environmental argument can change the consensus. How did we make people feel uncomfortable about driving huge 4x4 cars in town? By making them feel that their actions were excessive. How did we change the culture so that in general smoking was disapproved of in public places? By showing people that they should not pollute the environment. Of course people do still drive 4x4s and they do still smoke, but we don't celebrate that. For cosmetic surgery, it could be similar. Big business is suckering you into buying something expensive that you don't need. The more we consume it the less happy we are. Your natural body is the right one for you. We need to look at the instinctive body confidence of girls as a vanishing precious resource. When I started writing about these issues, it was about adult women and their relationship with the media. Now, we need to help mothers to stop passing on their body distress to the next generation. And governments need to take seriously the idea of teaching girls about these issues in schools, in a matter-of-fact way. Showing them that they are being

“Your natural body is the right one for you”

manipulated and sold. This may inoculate them against the pressure of magazines, films and the media. That's the thinking behind our Endangered Species campaign, that has launched this month in capital cities around the world. The young woman who can feel free to explore her interests without being preoccupied by how her body appears or focus on what procedure she should have in the future to change it is becoming an endangered species. **Endangered Species is an international summit, established by Susie Orbach, to celebrate body diversity and challenge the culture that teaches women and girls to hate their own bodies. Events will take place around the world in March with the main UK event to be held at the Southbank Centre in London on March 4. At the London Summit, individuals and groups from the UK and Ireland will be joined by initiatives throughout Europe to showcase the work they are already doing with and about young women. www.endangeredspecieswomen.org.uk**

## Bottom enhancement: the facts

**What's the procedure?** Even by the standards of the cosmetic surgery industry, bottom implants are by no means a conventional procedure. In all the years that I've been writing about beauty and aesthetic surgery, I've never found someone prepared to talk about why they have had it done. Douglas McGeorge, a cosmetic surgeon and former president of the British Association of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons (BAAPS), has never performed the procedure. He says: "The operation is not dissimilar from a breast augmentation in that the surgeon makes a pocket beneath the muscle — in this case in the buttock — and places an implant into that pocket. It is usually done in the upper part of the buttock in order to create a shapelier silhouette." BAAPS has no statistics on how many of its members have performed the procedure but its press office said: "It has never made it into the top ten." Surgeons at the more populist Transform Cosmetic Surgery chain undertook 28 butt-boosting ops last year — up from 11 the year before — but still a tiny number compared with the thousands of breast augmentations that are carried out annually.

**Why is it in vogue?** Round-rumped divas J-Lo and Beyoncé (pictured below) must be an influence, but it needs saying, and repeating, that this is a really niche procedure — something done and desired by very few people in the UK. Do you know of a single woman, whatever her skin colour, who actually wants a bigger backside? I don't. The phrase that most resonates with women in the UK is the



“It's desired by few people. Do you know a woman who wants a bigger backside?” agonised, “Does my bum look big in this?” (and no, we don't want an answer in the affirmative). In South America, however, bottom enhancement is hugely popular. Former Sugababes singer Mutya Buena admitted having boosted her bottom with implants last year, saying blithely: “Everyone's got it in the US and Brazil. I just wanted it a bit perkier. It's not that there was anything wrong with it — it's just a change. I like to be extreme.” Ah yes, Brazil. When I was there on honeymoon 20 years ago I was astonished to find leaflets offering quick and easy buttock boosting displayed on the coffee tables of the Copacabana Palace hotel. A quick stroll along the beach that afternoon made me see why, for Brazilian women, having a perfect backside was of such paramount importance.

**What are the risks?** For a conventional buttock-implant procedure, the risks are small. “This should be no more risky than a breast augmentation,” says McGeorge. “There is always a small risk with any kind of surgery but the risk of having an anaesthetic is smaller than the risk of driving to the hospital to have the procedure done. When it comes to elective cosmetic surgery, we are dealing with fit and healthy young adults.” It is once you go off-radar, off-label, to try unlicensed, inadvisable procedures such as injections of liquid silicone that the risks begin to rise exponentially. If that silicone is injected into a blood vessel — as may have been the case with Claudia Aderotimi — then it could cause a fatal blood clot to the lungs. There is a growing black market in this sort of treatment, with reports of so-called “pump-up parties” where members of the transgender community inject themselves to enhance their curves. Clearly, there are no figures for this, but those in the know say that it is on the rise. **Alice Hart-Davis**

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