

The Role of Breast Augmentation in the Barbara O'Leary Novels

How prevalent are breast augmentations?

In 2016, there were 290,467 breast augmentations (mammoplasties), up from 279,143 in 2015 and 212,500 in 2000, a gain of 4% and 37%, respectively¹. If the rate of breast augmentations continues at roughly 300,000 per year and the number of females reaching adulthood continues at approximately 1.9 million, then the percentage of women undergoing breast augmentations would stabilize at 15.7 %.

Personally, I do not believe the number of breast augmentations will stabilize at anything like one in six. Much more likely, breast augmentations will gain an acceptance similar to orthodonture and become an anticipated procedure for young women.

In the Barbara O'Leary novels, I decided to investigate the motivations and emotional impacts of breast augmentation on my socially and sexually troubled heroine. In particular, I wanted to focus on how a woman—who has attributed her socialization problems entirely to her body's shape—within a period of weeks, becomes sexually alluring and consequently gains the attention of men and women who had previously ignored her.

Instead of employing the current surgical techniques, I chose to employ an as yet to be developed hormone treatment. This avoided having to deal with the drawbacks of the current procedures while putting additional psychological pressure on my main character.

Barbara anticipates that the changes she is making in her physique will in some quiet, controlled manner improve her social life. To her surprise (and no one else's) Barbara's much altered body blasts Barbara out of her comfort (discomfort?) zone, into a new and challenging social life. A social life for which her previous life experiences have given her little preparation.

In essence, Barbara is a metaphor for the vast number of people who believe that cosmetic surgery, body art, drugs, etc. will, by themselves, achieve an elusive happiness and thus avoid the undertaking of difficult to make personal changes.

¹ www.plasticsurgery.org/documents/News/Statistics/2016/cosmetic-procedure-trends-2016.pdf