

My Boobs Beg to Differ by Rebecca Hasbrouck

Every person can claim some type of childhood trauma. Looking back, I can vividly recall mine: my insecurity with my breasts, specifically their overabundance. Nora Ephron's essay "A Few Words about Breasts" describes the opposite experience—growing up with small breasts and maturing at a later age. It was honest and clever. At the end of the essay, however, I became irritated, for Ephron writes, "my girlfriends, the ones with nice big breasts, would go on endlessly about how their lives had been far more miserable than mine" (124). I agreed with and related to her entire essay, except for these last statements. As a female who was traumatized by her large chest during childhood, I assert that women in my situation actually have a harder time. Ephron ends her essay by saying, "I have thought about their remarks, tried to put myself in their place, considered their point of view. I think they are full of shit" (124). Well, Nora Ephron, let me fill you in on the other side of the argument, and we will see how full of ___it I really am.

I started developing boobs around third grade at age eight and was fully developed by my fifth grade year at age ten. While my peers had yet to show even remote signs of puberty, I was the only ten-year-old with size 34C boobs. The other ten-year-olds were running around braless, playing sports at recess with the thought of breasts a mere hope in the backs of their minds. Such carefree play for me, though, was not so simple.

I have loved sports since kindergarten when I joined my first soccer league. Since then, I have inevitably been the fastest girl on every team I played on. I was always the first girl to be picked for a team in gym, which was my favorite class. I also had many guy friends that I frequently challenged on the sports field. In fifth grade, however, my avid participation in athletics dwindled. I became scared that, instead of knocking down my opponent by my swift and skilled footwork or aggressive and intimidating moves, I would knock him down by a quick turn of my torso with a flying 34C breast. These heaping mounds began to bounce as I ran and I was positive my peers would notice. It was around this time that my mother forced me, gagged and bound (or just whining), into the car for a trip to a lingerie store.

I stared into the lingerie shop with a look of pure horror on my ten-year-old face. I saw women casually shopping for push-ups, men picking out lingerie for their wives, and mothers assisting their teenage daughters in finding a bra to make them look "perkier." I must repeat, I was ten years old. I did not fit in with this boob-familiar crowd. With my mother pulling my arm, I stomped into the store with my Umbro sports shorts and soccer jersey. My face turned a dark shade of maroon as my mother asked an employee what size bra I should buy. When my mother and the employee descended to the back of the store, I overheard the words, "She looks like a size C to me." With that, I darted to the car. My mother understood I would not return into the store without physical force, so she remained to shop. She soon emerged with two bags filled with sports bras.

After overcoming the initial embarrassment of wearing bras, sports bras became my friends. I put one on and became a small step closer to the chest size of my girl friends. That was not enough satisfaction for me, though. I did not want boobs and went to extreme measures to make them invisible. So out came the duct tape and Ace bandages. Yes, duct tape. It sounds painful, but hear me out. After an aching night of sleeping on my stomach to prevent any more chest growth, I began my routine before school. I put my sports bra on. Then, I uncovered my secret stash of duct tape from my sock drawer and taped it around my chest a few times. Since this made it slightly hard to inhale, I would alternate using duct tape with an Ace bandage that served the same purpose while allowing more expansion to breathe. Over the assortment of bondages, I put on a t-shirt and large sweatshirt. Now, Nora Ephron, how does this procedure compare with your experience of having "three padded bras, every single one of them with different-sized breasts" (121)? Trust me, there is no comparison.

Those bulky sweatshirts that I wore over my bandages should have been reserved for cold weather. Not in my case. I was usually found wearing a sweatshirt most times. Winter time required pants and a sweatshirt, of course. During the spring, I would change the daily outfit to shorts and—prepare to be surprised—a sweatshirt. Everyone, even big-breasted pre-teens, needs a little variety. Summer was the season I dreaded. I grew up on the shore, and it was abnormal that I did not look forward to days at the

beach. Don't worry—I left the sweatshirt at home when I did venture to the beach. I never took off my shorts, though, because with boobs came hips and curves, which no one else had yet.

The summer of fifth grade was when the girls and boys began shyly associating with each other. One of my best friends began having co-ed pool parties. I dreaded these pool parties because I was surrounded by two humiliating types of people: slender, pre-pubescent girls with just enough signs of maturation on their bikini-clad bodies and boys not yet showing signs of puberty but whose hormones were beginning to race. The girls were not harsh; they simply made comments about how they wished their boobs would grow like mine. I nodded and smiled but secretly wanted to scream and shake sense into them. The boys seemed ruthless to me then. I realize now that it was not their fault and they did not mean to embarrass me as much as they did; it was their hormones talking. Yelling, more specifically. Yelling words that would forever make me cringe. Even now, I cannot think of a word for breasts that does not bring a feeling of disgust. "Breast" is decent, but it sounds a bit health-bookish. "Boobs" is more informal, not completely derogatory, and is my term of choice. But the words these boys would say were bad. They were very bad. For example, I cannot count how many times I was told how huge my titties, bazookas, coconuts, jugs, headlights, hooters, knockers, puppies, rack, and ta-tas were. The words repulsed me. I even grimaced when hearing references to innocent fruits such as grapefruits, melons, and cantaloupes!

On a more serious note, this incessant teasing from the boys and the exclusion from the group of girls made me feel out of place and alone, influencing my self-esteem and self-awareness. Current research confirms these feelings of isolation and insecurity. According to one study, "Little Girls in Women's Bodies," "Teasing about breast development is related to poor body image, heightened self-awareness, and self-consciousness" (Summers-Efler). These feelings led to a sense of confusion. I couldn't understand why I had them in such a robust size. The usual explanations, such as "very overweight girls tend to mature earlier" (Lemonick 3), didn't apply. I defied the research. I was never overweight. I was always active and my family ate healthy foods. Even my genetics did not have a relation; women in both my mother's and father's families are not big breasted. In fact, most with a normal-sized chest have had plastic surgery. Thus, I did not fit in with my peers or my family. At that point in my puberty process, I was at the stage "when a child usually develops a sense of who she is and where she fits in the world" (Lemonick 5). Well, with my body, I felt like I was a ten-year-old grown woman, and the only place in the world I would fit was at a Hooters restaurant serving chicken wings to male customers. With time, however, my life improved.

There is closure to my childhood boob-trauma. Eventually, my girl friends developed into women with breasts and the boys began to hint at becoming slightly mature men. The men who still stare at my chest rather than my eyes are the ones I have learned to avoid. I continued to play sports, wearing a sports bra but minus the tape, and my boobs fit in with the rest of the team. If I stay active, they remain at a manageable size and look great in a halter top.

Yet, as Ephron says, "here I am, stuck with the psychological remains of it all" (124). I can relate to her statement that if she would have had boobs, she would be a different person. If I did not have them, I would be quite different myself. We shared similar childhoods with opposite issues yielding like effects. I still think I had it worse. My knockers and I both agree.

Works Cited

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