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NICETITS IN BIOMEDICAL WASTE

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or: On Seeking a Radical Breast Reduction.

Content note: no pics, but discussion of surgery, recovery, wound care, gore etc.



Omigod... why are you getting PLASTIC SURGERY 😡



I was really lucky that I could afford, after three years of working what I call "the job from *Egg* (2005)," to pay for a private surgery to get the result I wanted. I had talked to my GP about the back and neck pain, skin irritation, sweat, limited movement, and inability to

easily purchase bras or clothing that looked good on me, but was told it wasn't enough reason to justify getting one through the so-called "health service," even though it clearly had a longer and more consistent impact on my physical and mental state than the undesired pregnancy risk or mental illnesses that I was easily able to get proper medications for.

I could have tried to do it through the overburdened gender clinic, but I was (and am) wary of both psychs and being understood from a classificatory standpoint, and the idea of waiting longer, and having to declare myself & be legally recognized as something-or-other was miserable!!! It also felt totally unrelated to my gender or lack thereof that I wanted to get rid of these things..

I remember vividly, being 19 or 20 and in college, frowning at my boobs in the mirror and thinking, in 10 years I'll still be stuck feeling as miserable and annoyed about this. And then I turned 30... In the meantime I had realized I was bisexual, been told I wasn't bisexual by a therapist, made a new set of friends who could laugh at something as stupid as that, got married, and finally also began describing myself as "agender" if I absolutely had to ~reveal my gender~ as they say... despite all this I realized I still felt the exact same way about my boobs!



I decided to go to consultations at a few private clinics to gauge how aggressive of a breast reduction I could get from them. I didn't want something that would read only as "female breasts" but I also loved, to be a bit crass, how most men did actually have a bit to grab there, and felt 100% flat wouldn't work with the rest of my body type. This is totally insane but my ideal chest was this wild "men who look like old lesbians" look Neil Breen had going on in *Double Down* (2005). Now, That's What I Call Androgyny!



But wait... aren't I being a little BLASE about this? Thanks for asking. Of course, I'm aware of the woo-woo ~women supporting women~ who are also morally repulsed by any attempt to change your body (well, certain ~unnatural~ kinds of change), which you should love so much regardless of how it's perceived by society or personally challenging to you, who

would say I just needed to accept myself more. The ones running around braless while having b-cups being like, yeah, anyone can do this! I wonder what people like me are meant to do in their body positivity filled plastic surgery free utopia, just silently bear the proportionally more irritating and inconvenient aspects of having breasts past a certain point so they can frolic and tee hee? I felt as resentful towards this attitude as I did towards the ex who described me as "overall an 8, but your boobs are a 10." Like... why am I even keeping these things around for you???

Still, feeling morally browbeaten by this ideal, poking out at me from cutesy titty designs on mugs and tote bags, I tried, taking the line from *Liquid Sky*, to convince myself: *My breasts are every bit as androgynous as David Bowie's*. It was obviously a strategy of last resort. Even if, hypothetically, I could make myself believe it and live in a society that also read them as such, I didn't like them, I had never liked them, so what was the point of so much mental monitoring and self-flagellation? And all in service of this sentimentalized ideal of a "natural" body that I didn't even respect.

I was already thoroughly unnatural. I love caffeine and alcohol and blue raspberry and vaccines and hair dye and ibuprofen and stopping my menstrual period dead in its tracks with birth control... "Chemicals" are spectacular to me. As an undiagnosed autistic child I ate erasers and gnawed on plastic pens constantly. I had no hope of "wholesome" or "clean living" from the start, and I find the pursuit of it kind of neurotic and sad. If nature is unjust, like, just change nature scoob.

It feels weird when, as soon as you start talking about this stuff, being excited that it's going forward, people around you suddenly have strong opinions on plastic surgery as a politically urgent matter of our times (REALLY?). They seem to think it just kind of puts you in the bimbofication machine or whatever and therefore is some sort of Inherent Evil. Even more than before, seeing this response emphasized that my relationship to my body and gender was not what most people would consider "normal," but by then I was ok with being different. The burden of "being a good example" or "expanding the perception of what ~womanhood~ can look like" is always unequally foisted on people who have little attachment to it, or who are trying to leave, like asking someone putting on their coat to make the party more interesting. Like, why don't YOU do that if you want to stay... I'm outta here.

FEARS!!!

Contra fearmongering about plastic surgery in general, breast reduction is far and beyond one of the so-called "voluntary" procedures with the highest satisfaction rate, outclassing many times over surgeries people see as far more understandable or essential, like knee surgery, for example. And I had known I wanted this for at least 10 years. So what did I still manage to be scared about, lol?

My biggest fear was that the surgeon, who seemed to regard my desire to be as rid of these things as was practical with the neutrality I wanted, rather than horror or doubt, would do some sort of spontaneous heel turn in the middle of surgery... I'd wake up with perky and proportional D/C cups instead. NIGHTMAAAARE!!!

I hate asking for things, because I guess I've gotten used to my preferences being treated as weird or irrelevant, asking for things and people never following through, or always doing it in the wrongest way possible. I hate the disappointment and the effort of having to undo and redo something I could have just saved all the sum misery of by doing myself.





I was jealous of the shed orchi, honestly, I was at the point of being jealous of martyrdom scenes in religious art where saints were getting their tits sliced off with swords or yanked at by metal clamps. It was horrible to say but I envied the helplessness with which people who had breast cancer got double mastectomies. The serene, supportive reception of the news epitomised by the post-hoc celebrity announcement (my parents were, of course, when I eventually figured I had to tell them, cagey about the surgery even though I'd talked about it for years) and shock at the lack of character and poor values of partners who still felt a sense of ownership over the ill-fated breasts...

I wanted to be protected by society concluding I had no choice, rather than the individual effort and interpersonal risk of behavior that's understood, alternately, as "volitional..." When Kathy Acker chose a mastectomy rather than chemo to the horror of many of her associates, she justified it, maybe flippantly. It was fine because: "I'd rather look like a boy," a sentiment in line with her gender-swapping bisexual literary oeuvre.



Before I had the money and stability to pursue the surgery I sometimes fantasized about an act of god taking the choice away from me. But eventually, I couldn't just wait around, on the edge of my seat to stoically accept an act of god I didn't even believe in. I had to do it: "I'll make myself look more like a boy, on purpose." But it was more complicated than just deciding to do something, because it wasn't fully internal, I had to get an outside person to understand and go along with it, which was... SCARY!

While I wanted the societal level permission that makes a choice not even a choice so going forward would be (conditionally) easier, this condition of exception all the while relied on what made everything else so hard: the idea of even necessary, medically-approved removal being disfiguring and tragic, that an ideologically "whole" and "intact" body was inherently good and always better than the alternative. When I told my manager I'd need to take time off from the surgery, and she instantly made a concerned, sympathetic face I said "Don't worry, it's a good one!" And then thought, *Who the hell says that!?!* But it turned out to be true, despite the lingering doubts implanted in me by a normative society, that I'd regret it, that I'd suffer and hate my body... Spoiler alert: It was a good surgery.

Another thing I was scared about, or I guess a little put off by, was the potential of losing sensation in my nipples, or losing them altogether. Even though they didn't have much sensation, due to being on such large breasts, I liked how they were kind of flat and small, sexually indeterminate, despite how obvious my breasts were. Even moreso than clit/dick or gspot/prostate, the nipples felt to me like a sort of perforation mark that showed gender could bend (or be bent) either way... it would be a shame to lose them.



I knew I needed the surgery to finally put this issue to rest, and I felt confident choosing it, but it's still somewhat uncanny to accept the idea that a part of your body, full of blood and warmth and sense, will be cut out and somewhere else in the process. After the surgery was scheduled, I had a weirdly vivid dream of me laying in a dark space, and my breasts

being detached from me, they felt like an alien object. Seeing a picture of someone's removed breast flesh (that their doctor had sent them! How chill lol) felt uncomfortable but less surreal than the dream. Cradled in surgical blue, the flesh was going slightly grey, but, just like when gore shots had snuck up on me during my early 00s internet childhood, I was morbidly impressed by the almost neon vividness of blood, cut flesh and fat. I'm glad I didn't have to look at my own, I'm glad I don't know exactly where it goes beyond some broad category of "medical waste disposal." The idea of it being out in the world somewhere, technically (matter is, of course, neither created nor destroyed) is a little uneasy... but also, the same will be true for the rest of my body in the long run.

Anesthesia was also kind of conceptually troubling, another manifestation of my fears of having to rely on others and not being fully present/in control of something I'd decided I need to do. What better time, of course, than when I'm out cold unconscious for the doctor to turn evil and decide not to give me small boobs? Or, horror, make them bigger? But... ok, if that happens it happens. It would be upsetting but fixable. But what about something more permanent? What if I DIE! What if I get trapped in some sort of consciousness prison?!?

Part of me still semi believed that there was like a tiiiiny possibility that the process will dislocate me from my consciousness. And when I wake up it would still be the me everyone else knows but *I* wouldn't be experiencing it, you know? Some impostor bitch will be instead!!! Enjoying my life with small tits, eating food and having sex w/ my partner etc and I'm not there for it! NIGHTMAAAAARE!!!! I thought I overcame this fear but on the day of the surgery as they were ready for me to go down and I had to leave Stephen back in my room after awkwardly getting my breasts marked up... I was scared!

When they led me down to the room where you lay on the table and they start the anaesthesia process, I was shaking like a leaf, feeling weirdly shaped and vulnerable in the hospital gown ("the closest thing to a dress I've ever seen you in" my partner remarked) with a bunch of people and scary looking racks of syringes and stuff all around. I was almost too jittery to climb up on the table without a hand, and tried to lay still. The staff were really nice, asking me questions about where I lived and my job to try and distract me but past a certain point I just straight up said "I'm having trouble coming up with answers to these questions because I'm so scared." lol. At that point the anaesthesiologist probably decided he'd had enough, put something over my face and said "here, it's just oxygen" and then I was slowly coming to in a different room three hours later.

Baby's First Surgical Wounds.

Surgery is so fucking cool. It's amazing how much stuff they can do to you. When I woke up I remember being quite out of it, more concerned about fully waking myself up, and then when I was a bit more coherent they wheeled me back up to my room. I was happy to see Stephen and very woozy. It was late so he went back home once I was semi-coherent... the nurses brought me a little yogurt cup and some water which I managed ok... I hadn't eaten or drank anything since around 10 AM. They gave me half a codeine which immediately made me feel like I was going to throw up but I very bravely didn't in the span it took them to realize I was feeling like a newbie sailor being tossed around in a storm at sea and bringing me an additional anti-nausea tablet.

I didn't really sleep, but just kind of laid there in a sort of semi-conscious nap brain listening to the sounds outside and relaxing. I tried moving around a bit in the morning but felt really fragile, and also like I didn't have great coordination over my legs yet from the anaesthesia wearing off. I had to use the toilet chair at first and peed like a gallon lol. By then it was light out, and the TV was showing the Baltimore bridge disaster that had happened overnight... a taste of home, and very *Crash* (1996). Once I had a little more control of my body, I could get up to use the actual toilet and dress myself. The discharge nurses were super impressed by how small my boobs were now, having heard nearly a kilo was removed from each one. Once I seemed pretty stable (my naturally low blood pressure took longer than usual to rebound after the surgery, which contributed to feeling weak and woozy for a bit longer than expected) I was good to go home, and happy to soon be resting in my own bed.

There wasn't a ton of pain. I managed the first week and a half with paracetamol, which surprised me, and then would just take some if I had pain or soreness situationally afterwards. What it most felt like the first few days was the stinging and tightness of a sunburn. Then, as you heal, you might get little zaps of shooting pain, sore spots, or numbness that move around over time, and a lot of swelling is pretty much guaranteed (and the most annoying thing, to me)... these are all parts of the weeks-long process of your nerves and flesh rebuilding to accommodate the new shape surgery has put it in.

StreamTime LIVE - Baltimore, MD 2024-03-26 01:29:19 EDT

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Surgery is also scary because it's different than pretty much anything else you experience normally. I thought I would be fine, I've dealt with nasty cuts and scrapes throughout life, I also don't mind gory movies, but when I first had to take off the gauze myself, I nearly dropped to the floor. It makes you hyperaware of your body, and also horrifying sounding things that can go wrong with it (NECROSIS???). This hyperawareness can make you feel closed off and fragile. You really experience your body as material rather than the medium you don't really think about experiencing the world through on a day-to-day basis when you're not recovering from something. I want to embrace my scars, maybe even treat them as sexy a la *Crash* (1996), but they still feel a little too raw to throw myself into sexual abandon with.



Still, getting this surgery is affirming in a positive sense; I'm amazed at how quickly I completely forgot what it was like to have big boobs, and just felt like my body was how it should be, quite banal. I don't have much to say here. It's not actually dramatic, it's more like, you wake up, realize your boobs are small, and that reality simply matches your self image now. Ok! But it's also affirming in the negative sense implied by the title of this zine; it feels good and powerful to discard something I never wanted but people implied I should keep, either because it was "natural" or hypothetically made me more "attractive" or a fascistbrained combo of both.

The power of refusal can be both stronger and more difficult to wield in a society that seems sometimes obsessed with positivity, or failing that "authenticity" and making the best of your tragic lot, but I've always found it clarifying; it serves me well. Rejecting the idea that I should want what was natural, proportional, attractive, normal... even if finding people I could trust with that desire was scary and hard, ultimately gave me a stronger sense of self, and a body I feel exponentially more at ease in.



TOP 10 TIPS FROM MY OWN LIMITED PERSONAL EXPERIENCE:

1. Go to a few different consultations, inquire at a few different places. See which gives you a more judgment-free vibe on your goal results. Some will cost money at this stage, some won't... unfortunately the one that did give me the best vibe had an initial charge of £125
2. Red flag terms at the consultation: "proportional," "aesthetics..." A place that also does top surgeries and gynecomastia surgery, for example, is probably going to be more flexible both in the doctors' mindset and surgical skills than a place that just does breast surgeries for cis women
3. You may have to sacrifice nipple sensation to get a small enough chest. This will usually be done by a Free Nipple Graft. I didn't end up needing it, though it was on the table. I told the surgeon I would rather be an A cup without nipple sensation than be larger and preserve it so he explained both techniques, which was a big part in feeling more comfortable getting it done with him.
4. Get some sports bras that zip in the front in a few different cup sizes (I started with a C and went down to an A after two weeks) if your surgeon isn't providing a specific post-surgical bra. Likewise a lot of button up flannel/PJ tops, this is all so you don't have to reach above your head to change clothes.



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5. I made a big batch of bone broth soup before the surgery (as recommended by my partner's friend Jacqueline). Having this with some rice, as well as a lot of pretzel sticks and lemonade were all agreeable before my appetite came back. Having palatable, easy to eat stuff on hand and in reach of wherever you're recovering will ensure that you...

6. EAT! When your appetite DOES come back you will be insanely hungry and you'll need fat / protein / salt/ sugar / vitamins the whole nine yards! Plus fluids! Discard all notions of eating "too much" and follow what you feel like you need, since your body needs materials for major repair work.



How to make bone broth

[Sara Buenfeld](#)

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7. The worst part of recovery for me (besides impatience/frustration, see next point) was changing bandages and showering. Be VERY careful and preferably have someone with you the first few times you do these things. I thought I was badass... I'd managed some bad cuts on my own without losing my head and generally had a decent tolerance for gory movies... Hellraiser is practically a comfort watch for me. But seeing even cleaned up, healing surgical wounds on your own body is a whole new can of worms, and a lot of people feel faint or even pass out. Take it slow, have someone with you who can prevent you from konking your head on the bathroom floor if it happens, and drink lots of water and rest afterwards!

8. Try to chill. Because A) you need a ton of rest, physically, but also B) recovery is not an uncomplicated, straightforward progression. Swelling and soreness will come and go, your energy levels will be up some days and super fatigued others, some days your scars will look clean and great and other times you'll find a weird crust on the bandages, and this is all very frustrating because you want to be over it and back to all the stuff you can normally do as soon as possible after a few days. These are all normal phases of healing so try... TRY!!! To relax.
9. Maternity pillow... YES it will screw up your online ads forever, but the large, u-shaped maternity pillows are a must for when you're propped up in bed for the first few days, and when you have to sleep on your back forEVER (not forever, but I am in the middle of it now and HATE it).



10. Take time to ENJOY IT! With all the practical aspects of surgery recovery to worry about and manage each day, it's easy to lose sight of how you finally got something you wanted for years, something that's going to significantly improve your daily experience of embodiment. GENTLY try on some of your old clothes and see how much better they fit on you, or maybe splurge on a style of clothing you always wanted to try but couldn't. Or even just admire yourself for a bit, even if you're feeling exhausted and crusty.

By the time you see this
~~X~~
5 not me anymore :)