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I wore that bra the next day – and every single day after that. If people thought I'd splashed out on implants, they were too polite to say. I let my new breasts lead me into rooms, not unlike *Mad Men's* Joan Holloway. I purposely bumped them into things. I adored how they looked in T-shirts, turtlenecks and tank tops. At the end of the day, I would reluctantly remove the fake-boob bra, not glancing at what was left behind. This went on for months, until one day I got out of the shower and looked – I mean, really looked – at my breasts. They seemed... pathetic. Insignificant. Sad. Inferior. Being neutral about your breasts is one thing; hating them is quite another.

I tried to remember what it was I had liked about them before that bra had come along, and when I realized that I couldn't think of one thing, something snapped. Out went the bra (OK, bras – I had bought several more of the same style). Operation Reclaim My Boobs was declared. First step: bra shopping.

"I don't want any padding," I said to the saleswoman, making circular motions around my chest.

"Some padding," she said, making the universal hoist-'em-up sign with her hands. "Light padding."

"No," I said. "No padding."

She glanced at my chest and raised an eyebrow, then bustled around before handing me a collection of bras that had, yes, padding.

"These aren't padded," she said pre-emptively. "They're formed. You need some shape."

I let myself be marched into the change room. Some shape, indeed: They changed my breasts into something they weren't – something that made me feel crappy when I took them off. I left the change room and handed the bras back to the saleswoman. She wearily gestured toward the cottony-things section.

There, I found what I wanted: two stretchy triangles on a string – the "why bother?" of bras. Bras that give me something between skin and clothes but don't alter my shape.

With the fake-boob bras gone, I slowly got reacquainted with my breasts again. I started appreciating how they looked, unadulterated, in T-shirts, turtlenecks and tank tops. And as more and more starlets opt for implants in sizes that match their first initials, I like being different and natural and me. My breasts are happy and (knock wood) healthy, and that's pretty much all I need them to be.



Toss her chest

Elisabeth Dale, a Seattle-based ta-ta expert and author of *Boobs: A Guide to Your Girls*, shares her thoughts on boob jobs, breastfeeding and more.

BY MAUREEN HALUSHAK

Over the past few months, there has been heated speculation that both Sarah Palin and Kate Hudson have had implants. Why are we so obsessed with whether or not people – especially celebs – have given their girls a boost? "Breasts hold a lot of power in our society, and when we feel that someone has pimped their ride, so to speak, then we criticize them. You can literally suck fat off any other part of your body, but God forbid you add a little breast power on top."

We're bombarded with breast images in advertising, movies and television. What impact, good or bad, is this having on the way we perceive our own set? "The breasts we tend to see in the media are typically C cups, but the average woman measures closer to a DD or E these days, so if you're bigger [or smaller] than that, you might feel like something is wrong with you. They also tend to be pushed up high to create cleavage, and that's not realistic – there is no such thing as cleavage in nature. To get a true sense of the variety that exists, I suggest visiting the breast education website 007b.com, where real women have uploaded nonsexual photos of their breasts. It will give you an idea of all the different types of boobs out there."

Finally, we live in a society where the Victoria's Secret fashion show is broadcast on primetime television, yet many women still don't feel comfortable breastfeeding in public. What gives? "I think a lot of it has to do with the fact that, while breasts are everywhere, we have this fear of seeing nipples – the only place you can find them is in men's magazines or pornography. Studies show that one of the main reasons that women in the United States prefer buying moulded-cup bras is because they don't want to show their nipples; an erect nipple is seen as an aroused nipple, even though we know our nipples can get erect when we're in the freezer aisle at the supermarket. The more we hide the nipple and the more we sexualize it, the more difficult we make it for women to breastfeed in public."