

Booby-Trapped: How to Feel Normal in a Breast-Obsessed World

Nili Sachs

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As every woman past puberty knows (and sadly, increasingly before puberty as well), when it comes to breast development, size really does matter. Even if a woman is content with the shape, width, and breadth of her bosom, it's likely that she knows at least one friend who isn't quite so happy—the huge number of implant surgeries done every year isn't surprising. Why can't there be acceptance of what nature has given, no matter what the size? That's the question taken up by the author, a psychotherapist and author of *Mental Health of Immigrants*. She also poses other important inquiries, like, why do women sometimes have such a poor self-image? How do our definitions of what is feminine shape our perceptions about appearance, emotional health, and attractiveness to potential romantic partners?

To address these deep-rooted anxieties, Sachs structures the book like a glimpse into a group therapy session of ten women. Using her own experience with such therapy, the author shows how women with different viewpoints share the same fears and concerns about their bodies and how others view them. The device, which feels a bit too pat and artificially constructed at first, begins to work very well as Sachs develops each character and lets individual personalities shine through. As in an actual group therapy session, much insight comes from listening. Sachs writes, "The beauty of group work is that when a single member shares, so many levels of the psychotherapy process occur simultaneously. When a person talks about her pain, one might identify with her, another might recognize her spouse or a family member or friend, and still another will gain new insight into an old issue. Results can speed up considerably when more people are sharing a problem."

About the problem of unhappiness with one's breast size, Sachs' group has much to say, and it's vital talk for anyone who has looked down and wondered whether more happiness could be achieved with a larger cup size. From the discussions of why they aren't satisfied with that part of their bodies, the women move on to larger topics like self-image, friendship, and maternal relationships, but they always move back to the breast discussion, as if it's a center point from which to follow other conversational paths. The result is a sparkling combination of rigorous social commentary and commonsense talk about an issue that affects all women, no matter what size they might be.

ELIZABETH MILLARD (July / August 2003)

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