

Broken Silence

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Developmental (Childhood) Obesity vs. Age Onset Obesity

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I became obese when I was 5, and was dieting by the time I was 10. I was a teenager wearing 16's and 18's during the time of Twiggy, when anything bigger than a 7 was fat. Now a size 4, and having had a long time to consider this, I have come to realize that there are major differences between those who are overweight/obese who were that way as children and those who gained their weight as adults, usually after marriage and perhaps not until after having children.

Most of the differences have to do with growing up. Girls who are fat don't date as much. We spend time reading and doing homework. Not a bad thing, and it certainly served me well in that way. The other side of the coin is a damaged self-esteem and often a difficulty in relationships as an adult, mostly from a lack of experience and a compilation of bad experiences.

The issue that concerns me here, however, is that of self image. We form our self image in our developmental years. Besides being the basis of how we think and feel about ourselves, we literally set a picture in our minds of what we look like, particularly in our teen years, which we carry through life.

If you observe women who became overweight as adults, you will notice that they carry themselves and dress as if they are still thin. They often appear to be unaware that they are even overweight, at least observably. I first noticed this when my sister, a size 7 in high school, a size 3 bride, and a 0 after having a baby, gained weight in her fifties. As a 14, she still walked and talked and carried herself like a delicate thing.

The lack of any experience being thin, even just normal weight, was so foreign to me, I didn't realize for a long time that I walked, moved, and carried myself like a 300 pound woman even after five years as a size 4.

The point here is this: if you have grown up normal and get heavy, you have in your head your image of you, and, when you lose the weight you simply have brought your body back into line with your self perception. If, like me, you were never thin and you lose weight, there is a void; there is no 'real you' to go 'back' to. I am having to learn to walk and stand and move appropriately to my weight now. I have to find women to emulate, to model after.

If you find yourself in this position, magazines and television are great places to find these models. People you know in real life also make good models. You may need to have a friend who knows you well help you appraise yourself. The mirror is your truest reflection (pun intended), but be aware that if you have always been overweight your mind may have already trained itself to see but not see.

I have found that the best way to get a handle on what you really look like at any weight is a good frontal photograph, a good side photo, and, though it may sound strange, a good back photo. In fact, the rear shot is the best; all the mind games your head runs only work where they are ingrained. As we rarely see ourselves from the back in a full shot, that image will defeat the cerebral smokescreens and make it through to your consciousness.

So, if you are an adult onset obesity victim, use your memory and family photos to help guide you back to normalcy. If, like me, you don't have a normal you to look to, take photos, find a model for yourself, and find normalcy for the first time.

Good luck!