

SOUND MIND, SOUND BODY COLUMN

Vicious cycle traps the obese

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Living in modern society is challenging, competitive and stressful.

Sometimes, stress leads to poor habits such as physical inactivity or binge-eating disorders. Completing a vicious cycle that confronts millions of Americans, research finds obese people struggle to either continue education after high school or find employment.

One measure of obesity is having a BMI above 30. You can find yours by entering your height and weight into an online BMI calculator (just Google BMI to find one). Society knows a lack of physical activity, poor diets, increased computer usage and lack of parental guidance are just a few of the contributors to obesity.

Various studies show obese youths and adolescents receive lower grades than their peers. The 2009 National Youth Risk Behavior Survey includes some sobering statistics. For example, 60 percent of teens who did not play at least one sport and 47 percent of students who drank at least one glass of pop per day earned D-F grades in class. In addition, 76 percent of youths who are active less than 60 minutes per day and less than five days per week also pulled failing grades. One can only wonder and ask "why?"

Many internal and external factors trigger obesity. Social stigma plays a major role or factor in the psychological process of a developing, obese teen. A.J. Stunkard finds in his 1985 research, "Children as young as 6 describe silhouettes of the obese child as 'lazy', 'dirty', 'stupid', 'ugly', 'cheats' and 'lies' ... children and adults rate the obese child as the least likable."

This issue confronts female teens more, leaving them socially isolated, self-conscious and emotionally distressed.

More recent research mentions that girls are highly reactive to social network responses and are more likely to evaluate themselves through feedback from significant relationships. A study conducted by Robert Crosnoe at the University of Texas showed results that non-obese high school girls were 50 percent more likely than obese girls to attend college, where obese people are rare.

In addition, Crosnoe study states, "girls who were obese ... demonstrated significant or marginally significant increases in self-rejection, suicidal ideation, alcohol use, marijuana use and class failure ... demonstrated increases in truancy during this period if they

attended schools with a low representation of obese girls in the student body."

Employment is another challenging area. Andrea Chernov's 2006 research states, "Employers have three main reasons to not hire an obese person. Employers use store image, insurance costs and future health conditions, and physical limitations as reasons not to hire obese people."

Along with discrimination, obese people receive less respect and service at work or in their daily life. "

Society often has a low opinion of those who are obese yet a high opinion of the thin," according to Chernov.

A person I love dearly told me, "For the first 39 years of my life, I was thin, beautiful and people always respected me. After I got Graves' disease, I gained 50 pounds, and noticed that people are disgusted to look at me, blame me for all the problems and treat me like crap at work."

This style of behavior is brought upon from societal stigmas and learned manners from parents and peers. People should instead empathize with the obese. From medical issues and genetics to personal struggles, obese people have to fight their way to gain acceptance and employment. My friend said to me, "I need to find a new job with health insurance. But who is going to hire a 50-year-old fat person with a disease?"

Those powerful words should send a message to parents to educate their children not to bully overweight peers. In addition, employers should look at the qualifications and personality of that person. Because what makes obese people different from thin people? Nothing except that they have more adipose tissue than a "normal" person.

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