

my weight, myself

Do ten extra pounds make me a less worthy person?

I'm in pain. Not physically—though my pain is derived from something physical. I am fat. Not obese, just overweight . . . chunky. I always used to look down on fat people. I'd laugh at women taking up two seats on the bus. But then I realized that maybe I wasn't all that different from them.

I was born light, five pounds or so, and I constantly wonder how I could've put 135 extra ones on my five-foot-two-inch frame. I love to eat. I can eat a whole box of chocolate chip cookies at one sitting. I don't even think about them or what they're doing to my body. I just eat. And eat. And eat. However, I *cannot* sit here and tell you it doesn't bother me. I blame my weight for the fact that I don't have a boyfriend. I blame it for the fact that people don't always remember to call me about parties. I blame it for my shyness and insecurity.

I know that it's irrational to let my weight and body control my life. I know I'd be the same person no matter what I weighed. I can't let the bathroom scale be the scale I measure my whole self on. I know I should feel all these rational and logical sentiments, but the truth is—whether it's caused by the media, my school, whatever—what I know and what I feel are two different things. I still weigh myself every morning. I'm still unhappy when I've gained a few pounds.

A few summers ago, I weighed what I thought was a lot: 131 pounds. I spent the whole summer running and dieting, and I got down to about 122. I entered high school with loads of confidence, and what can I say? I was a hit. I started going out with a cool guy and I found a great group of friends. The best part of all, though, was that I really liked myself. I didn't agonize over my image in the mirror. I felt like a new person.

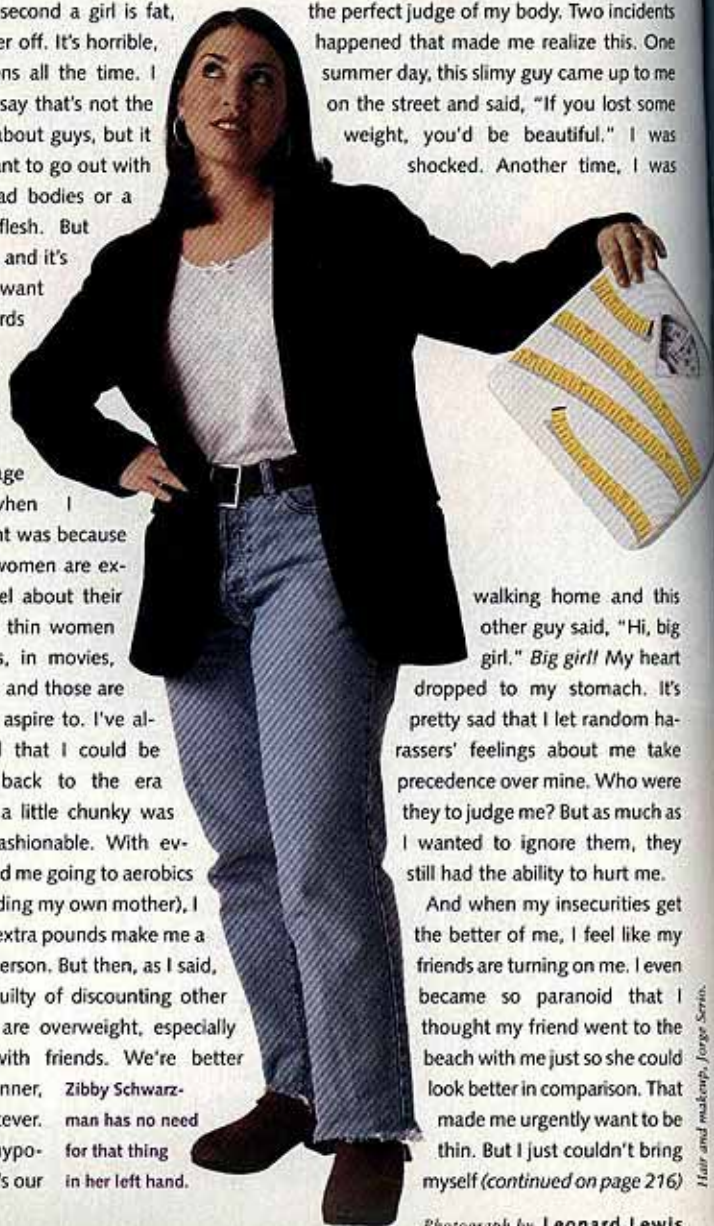
Then it happened. A month into school, my parents told me they were getting a divorce. When I heard, all my pent-up anger came out. That's when the monster inside of me

crept out and slithered around my stomach, my neck, until it bit me, and all its poisonous venom—fat—clung to my body. When I had put on about ten pounds, my boyfriend and I broke up. I couldn't shake the feeling that my weight had something to do with it. The second a girl is fat, guys write her off. It's horrible, but it happens all the time. I wish I could say that's not the way I think about guys, but it is. I never want to go out with guys with bad bodies or a little extra flesh. But when it's *me* and it's *my* body, I want those standards to change. They don't.

Perhaps the reason my self-image changed when I gained weight was because of the way women are expected to feel about their bodies. I see thin women in magazines, in movies, on television, and those are the images I aspire to. I've always wished that I could be transported back to the era when being a little chunky was considered fashionable. With everyone around me going to aerobics classes (including my own mother), I feel as if ten extra pounds make me a less worthy person. But then, as I said, I'm just as guilty of discounting other people who are overweight, especially when I'm with friends. We're better dressed, thinner, prettier, whatever. I know it's hypocritical, but it's our

way—however insecure—of assuring ourselves that we're better than our victim. That's the *real* reason I think we laugh at the fat women on the bus.

When I feel self-conscious about my weight, I decide that everyone in the world is the perfect judge of my body. Two incidents happened that made me realize this. One summer day, this slimy guy came up to me on the street and said, "If you lost some weight, you'd be beautiful." I was shocked. Another time, I was



walking home and this other guy said, "Hi, big girl." *Big girl!* My heart dropped to my stomach. It's pretty sad that I let random harassers' feelings about me take precedence over mine. Who were they to judge me? But as much as I wanted to ignore them, they still had the ability to hurt me.

And when my insecurities get the better of me, I feel like my friends are turning on me. I even became so paranoid that I thought my friend went to the beach with me just so she could look better in comparison. That made me urgently want to be thin. But I just couldn't bring myself (continued on page 216)

Hair and makeup: Jorge Serrin

Photograph by Leonard Lewis

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to diet. I'd start and stop, start and stop again.

There's no dignity in dieting. Waking up and getting on the scale to find that I've gained two pounds, especially when I'm on a diet, is like working really hard on a paper and getting a bad grade. Then those two extra pounds become ten in my mind. I get depressed and need something to make myself feel better. So I eat some cookies, and the cycle starts again.

I once tried going to a diet center, but even that didn't help. It was one of the most traumatic experiences of my life. Nice life. The worst part was when a "diet helper" said, "Wow! You hide your weight really well." At the time, I even took that as a compliment. That place was torture, because it was like admitting defeat. Yes, I'm overweight. Yes, I need your help. I hated every minute of it.

It's really no wonder that the diet center didn't work. It's hard to feel good about eating rice cakes when I'm angry that weight—and what people think of me because of it—matters so much. I guess I have to learn to be confident enough to like myself even with a few extra pounds. I once heard a guy say, "I'll never be able to love a woman unless she loves herself." That's why he wouldn't date out-of-shape women. But who says that a woman who isn't thin doesn't love herself? Not all women are built like supermodels. We can't let unrealistic images (and men like that) tell us who we are and how to look. We all have to judge for ourselves.

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