Man with "women's" hips

Dear Alice,

I'm a man who has been teased about the shape of his body!! How is it a man in his 20s, who is physically in great shape, has "women's" hips? I asked my doctor and he said a bunch of mumbo jumbo. They are in exact proportion to a woman sized 12 (waist, too). My wife doesn't mind it, but it really bothers me! The only thing you tell that I wasn't a woman is the fact I don't talk that high and also the breast issue (not having them).

Answer

Dear Reader,

Bone structure and proportion are determined primarily by genetics; the shape of your hips depends on the hereditary influence of your parents' physical characteristics. Total body shape also is affected by nutritional intake and amount of physical activity. We can control the foods we eat and how much we exercise, but we do not have control over our heredity.

By telling yourself you have "women's" hips, you are creating your own body image. Body image is how our physical appearance influences our social perceptions of ourselves and others. Satisfaction with how we look actively affects our behaviors, self-esteem, and how we think and feel overall about ourselves. Body image is influenced by many factors, one of which is popular media.

Another factor that plays into body image is how we are socialized, that is, what messages we receive from friends, family, and others about what is considered normal, attractive, and/or ideal. If you had never been teased, how would you, or do you, feel about your body? Instead of looking at yourself critically from someone else's eyes, can you challenge yourself to look at your body in a different way? Can you use and move your body in ways you enjoy? What about thinking about your body the way your wife does — think about her attraction to you and what she likes about you as you are.

How we feel about our body also depends upon what context we place ourselves in. You mention fitness, and one physiological advantage to having wider hips is having a greater availability of space for muscle development, potentially increasing strength. If you focus on the advantages...
that come along with what you have, you may even begin to believe it. If that doesn't seem to work, perhaps working with a professional may make a difference in the way you view and feel about your body. You may choose to make an appointment with a registered dietitian or a health care provider to talk about your fitness and diet. You may also be interested in processing your feelings about body image with a therapist. No matter which route(s) you choose, it's never a bad idea to start building a better bond between you and your bod!

Alice!
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