

NAAFA Newsletter

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NEWS AND COMMENT

NEW STUDY ANNOUNCED: SIZE AFFECTS SALARY

Fatter or shorter executives earn less than their thinner and taller counterparts. These were the findings in a new study, conducted by researchers at the University of Pittsburgh, announced in an Associated Press article on March 2. The AP article, printed nationwide, included NAAFA's reaction to the study, and extensively quoted NAAFA's President Eileen M. Lefebure.

The study was conducted by Drs. Irene Frieze and Josephine Olson, professors at the university who surveyed 1,200 graduates of the school's MBA program. Their findings: Men who are at least 20% overweight make \$4,000 less per year, and men who are shorter earn annually about \$600 less per inch than taller execs. Being short and fat doubled the problem. A short, fat man could expect to earn \$8,200 less per year than a tall, thin one.

Paul Ray, the president of an executive recruitment company was quoted as not being surprised by the findings. "What you're talking about is physical appearance and presence. And people who are taller and not overweight have a more commanding presence about them," he told AP.

The NAAFA response did not reflect surprise either. "This has been going on for years, and finally the press and government are starting to listen to us," President Lefebure said. "You can't discriminate against black people or women anymore, so the only people left are fat people. And if you're fat and short, you're really finished." John Foster, a vice president of a management recruiting firm said that weight was more critical than height. "You can't do much about your height, but you can...about your weight. A more controlled person...is probably going to give a better overall impression, and that is exemplified by the way a person controls his weight."

Asked by the AP to respond to Foster's remarks, Lefebure was quoted as saying that overweight people possess as much self-control as thin people. "It's so unfair to just look at a person and say 'you're out of control'. There are a lot of tall and thin people walking around in this world who are out of control," she said.

While 350 of the 1,200 execs surveyed were women, the study didn't show a strong correlation between size and salary for women because only a small number of women execs responding were significantly tall or overweight. Researcher Frieze speculated that attractiveness (being slim and tall) could be both an advantage and a disadvantage for women because "there's a suspicion of how much she's using her attractiveness" to succeed.

COMMENTARY

The AP story has appeared at a good time, just as interest in employment discrimination in NAAFA has been increasing, and NAAFA's Employment Committee has been preparing an agenda. When this **Newsletter** contacted Drs. Frieze and Olson, they were interested to hear of NAAFA's interest in their study. Dr. Olson, an economist with the Graduate School of Business at the University of Pittsburgh, had originally proposed to do a follow-up study to one done 12 years earlier on the height of executives; Dr. Frieze, of the Dept. of Psychology and Director of the Women's Center suggested that this time, weight be added to the study. It's good that she did--in the past, the media often had trouble believing that such discrimination really exists.

Example: Three years ago, some editors at USA TODAY planned to do an entire editorial page on the subject of weight discrimination in employment, but the idea was scrapped when the senior editor declared the problem to be nonexistent. When it was pointed out that such discrimination had been written about by the well-known job placement executive Robert Half, and proven by a study published by the State of Maryland, the senior editor replied that the problem must be a local one in Maryland. Honest!

Now, the Pittsburgh study has furnished evidence of such discrimination against fatter and shorter male executives, in the form of lower salaries, although it was unable to detect it at the executive level in women. The reason: Too few fat women execs who were MBA graduates at Pittsburgh to draw valid conclusions!

We'd like to see a good study done for all levels of employment...we believe that both men and women tend to suffer job discrimination at all levels if they are fat--and that such discrimination takes place at all ages. Even fat kids have lower aspirations, and by the time they get to high school, some tend to avoid pursuing ambitious programs in preparation for successful careers, or are steered away from them by guidance counselors!

Complicating the problem is the fact that no employer in the world can be expected to want to hire someone who lacks the proper training for the job, or goes through an interview without any evidence of self-confidence. Now all we have to do is prove that these problems exist, so that reporters can take them seriously--even though every personnel agency, state unemployment office, job placement counselor, and corporate headhunter in North America knows how hard it is to get a job for a fat person! And, equally important, even while proving that these problems exist, we must act to alleviate the problems! Otherwise, even more young people will be discouraged from preparing for many careers, since their advisors will have proof that even with the proper education, the kids won't get hired anyway! We have our work cut out for us. □

JAMES COCO DEAD AT 56

The actor James Coco died on Feb. 25 after a heart attack while at home. Well-known for his many roles on stage, in films, and on television, Coco was an inveterate yo-yo dieter, gaining and losing hundreds of pounds in his lifetime. He is also remembered for his book, The James Coco Diet, currently in bookstores. His many credits included two roles especially remembered by NAAFA members: A short-lived 1976 TV series called "The Dumplings" which came close to making the large figure seem to be an asset; and the Broadway show "Monsters", which included a play called "The Transfiguration of Benno Blimpie", reviewed in this Newsletter, Vol. V, No. 6 (March-April 1977). For that production, James Coco received NAAFA's Distinguished Achievement Award, as did Albert Innaurato, the playwright responsible for the show. □

JAMES COCO

James Coco was a fat man.
James Coco went on the rice diet.
James Coco became a thin man.
James Coco wrote a book about his diet.
James Coco became a fat man again.
James Coco died yesterday of a heart attack,
at the age of 56.
People will say he died of fat.
But I think he died of dieting!
How much longer must this culture of ours
promote suicide?
How many more valuable, talented lives must
we sacrifice to the diet monster?

Lynn Meletiche (NY)
February 26, 1987

AS I SEE IT... by William J. Fabrey, Founder of NAAFA

JAMES COCO - will be missed by many of us. He was a good actor, and regardless of how he felt about his weight at any particular time, he made the most of his roles. I searched his obituaries for possible blame for his heart attack, knowing that the public will assume that it was his weight--when, in all likelihood, his chronic dieting was probably a greater risk factor. So far, I have seen no such comment in the press.

Now I am at liberty to tell you that in 1970, James Coco called me in response to some NAAFA literature that I had mailed to him for his comment. He told me that he had read it very carefully, and was in complete agreement with our goals--and he wished us good luck in pursuing them. However, in reply to my request that he help us "get the message across" to the public, he said that not he, nor anyone else in show business would probably ever be able to publicly endorse what NAAFA is doing. He said that he couldn't even join the Red Cross without the approval and blessing of his agent and whoever holds his current contract. And he concluded by requesting that I keep our conversation a secret--that his concerns for his career outweighed his ability to help. He was very serious about this, and I have always kept quiet about it, even when pressed by reporters for the names of people in public life who agree with NAAFA's principles.

Time has proven him correct--only a handful of people in show business or in public life have been willing to endorse NAAFA, even though far more have privately agreed with our goals. They or their agents perceive the possible risk to their careers to be too high. But James Coco's humanity, as seen by the public, has served our cause just the same.

SO YOU THINK YOU'VE GOT PROBLEMS... I spoke with a member from Florida the other day, about a subject that we hear little about--compulsory dieting of those who are unable to fight back. The list is long--fat people in hospitals (general and mental); nursing homes; prisons; children without recourse to other sources of food; and so forth. I would add armed service personnel, but the inducement in the case of the military is usually denial of promotions or pension--something which some of us experience every day.

Imagine for a moment that you are flat on your back and helpless--and hungry 24 hours a day. In the third world countries, to be sure, starvation is all too common; and starvation in America is not unheard of, either. But there is something particularly heartbreaking about a helpless individual being made to suffer the pain of starvation because an institutional dietician is convinced that he or she needs to lose weight. Most laws protecting individual freedoms in the United States are inadequate with regard to such people--and even when such laws are fairly well conceived, they rarely cover the nutrition of institutionalized or helpless persons.

In the Florida case mentioned above, a retarded adult who is fat is being forced to endure an 800 calorie diet for extended periods of time, and forced to exercise to promote weight loss, despite a dislocated hip. The NAAFA, who is a staff member, is perceived as a radical, and her advice regarding the client is rejected.

I will suggest that someone on our Advisory Board (or other professional) do some research and write a paper with a title that might go something like: "Is compulsory dieting effective for obese patients?" Such a paper could comment on the long-term effects of such dieting, and also on whether such dieting might be a violation of patients' rights. A good paper could then be supplied to administrators and dieticians in nursing homes, hospitals, and other institutions; and a slightly different version of the paper might be supplied to parents of fat children.

If you know anything on this subject, please let me know, and I will forward your letter to anyone who ends up working on such a paper!

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EDITORIAL . . . by Managing Editor Nancy Summer

A POINT TO PONDER...

In 1980, Herbalife's first year in business, the company's sales were \$2 million. In 1981: \$10 million; in 1982: \$58 million; in 1983: \$142 million; in 1984: \$500 million plus; and in 1985: \$500 million plus. 1986 was a year of problems and setbacks for Herbalife. State and federal authorities investigated both their pyramid-like marketing plan and the safety and effectiveness of the various herb-based diet products. Sales in 1986 dropped to a mere \$260 million.

But things are looking up for Herbalife. After altering their formulas according to FDA directives and rewriting their literature, Herbalife has reported receiving a release from the FDA and approval from the Attorney General. In the launching ceremonies for Phase II on the Herbalife Cable Network (their own network...give me a break), Mark Hughes, Herbalife's founder and chief officer, predicted sales will boom. He also turned around the negative effects of the investigations and claimed that only Herbalife has been thoroughly investigated by government agencies and that consumers can now be assured (by their very own government) that Herbalife products are safe and effective.

These gross sales figures are staggering. Even in a bad year, Herbalife grossed 2600 times more than NAAFA's annual budget. Should we get discouraged by such facts? No...don't forget David and Goliath, the American revolution, and Ralph Nader fighting the major auto manufacturers. Sometimes the smaller, less powerful guys win in time.

But to win such a battle, you need several things: faith, dedication, self-confidence, a strong belief that your goals are valid, and an ability to remember who the real enemies are (so you don't expend your energy on internal battles.)

Herbalife is just one of the many groups and companies that make a lot of money off the fat of the land. There are very few voices in America expressing fat acceptance. If we stop believing in ourselves, or get lost in internal negativity, there will be one less voice on our side, and Mark Hughes, Richard Simmons, Jack LaLanne, and the rest of their ilk, will continue laughing all the way to the bank.

THIN AIR OR FAT CITY?

by Carrie Hemenway, Massachusetts

"This situation with my family is wearing me thin," a friend confided recently.

"Whoa," I replied. "Do you realize what you just said? You just used the word 'thin' in a negative way."

A group of ample-sized women gathered the next day and brainstormed other negative uses of the word 'thin': skating on thin ice (dangerous situation), thin skinned, thin blooded, thin air, thinning hair, thin as a rail, in thin straits, or, a variation, lean and mean.

Their positive images of "fat" included reading a big, fat book; having a fat wallet; fat city; a fat and fluffy down comforter; a fat mattress; a nice, fat tea cozy; a plump pillow; and best of all, a round, fat grandmother. The phrase "fat cat" was viewed both positively or negatively (depending on whether the object was viewed as a politician or a feline). And "big and bold" drew considerable applause.

The issue here is oppression. Fat people are an oppressed group, and this oppression is demonstrated through our language as well as through media images and concepts of attractiveness. Fat people do not choose this oppression, nor do other groups.

Why are fat people denied jobs, education, and basic human rights? Why do most clothing manufacturers stop making attractive clothes at size 12? Why are theater and restaurant seats usually one (small) size? Why are most large people denied adequate medical care? Why do most people think that there is only one size, one shape, that is correct, attractive or healthy? Why do people continue to think fat people eat more than others when many studies have concluded there is no difference as a group?

This oppression is maintained by cultural myths and **internalized** societal biases. And in hating fat, we are hating ourselves, our sexuality, and in some cases, our neighbors, mothers or fathers, aunts, and grandparents.

I belong to a support/study group consisting of six large, attractive, energetic, well educated, professional women. Yet, with our education and awareness, at one time or another, each has been approached by "well-meaning" strangers who have either recited the latest fad diet (uninvited) or asked us in loud, obtrusive tones why we haven't lost weight. I wonder why strangers think they can invade people's boundaries like that. More Americans have died from surgeries (or side effects of surgeries) geared to stop obesity, than died in the Vietnam conflict. What's wrong with this picture?

We can condition ourselves to reinforce an oppression that has grown to be a comfortable old habit, or we can make a conscious effort to rid ourselves of its ugliness and cruelty. All oppressions are wrong. Hover on thin air, or land in fat city. The choice is ours.

Carrie Hemenway was invited to submit an editorial to the Smith College newspaper, THE SOPHIAN. This article originally appeared in their November 17, 1986 edition.

MEDIA AND PUBLICITY WATCH

by Media Editor Bill Fabrey

Woman's Day (March 24 issue, on the stands now) finally published its story about Ohio NAAFA June Bailey and her husband, Don. Pick up a copy while you can! More on this coverage in our next issue.

The March 3rd edition of Woman's Day published a cover story entitled, "Is Thin Still In?" by Carol Tavris, Ph.D. The headline on the cover read, "Why Those Extra Pounds May Be Good For You"; among those interviewed for the article were NAAFA Advisors Paul Ernsberger, Ph.D., and Drs. O. Wayne Wooley and Susan C. Wooley. It concludes with a quote by Wayne Wooley, who believes that the whole issue of dieting and "overweight" is a fraud against women. The article quotes him as saying that "this is a political matter, not a medical one...it is political because it keeps women attending to their looks instead of the circumstances of their lives; it pits woman against woman; it destroys physical fitness and energy...saddest of all, it represents a rejection of the female body."

Oprah Winfrey did another "fat" show (Feb. 27)--focussing on fat bigotry. Four guests explained the reasons why they dislike fat people, and another four guests, including Shona Middleton (MI), told what it's like to be fat in a think-thin society. Some good points were heard and NAAFA was mentioned, but Shona did not get much time to be heard, and too much time was spent talking about compulsive eating...

Publicity focussed on the Midwestern Conference in Lansing, MI in early November in several publications. Mid-Michigan chapter president Jerry Lamb, an organizer of the conference, was featured in an article "Fat people seek end to bias" in the Lansing State Journal (10/31/86); Lamb, as well as keynote speaker Russell F. Williams (MD) and Robin Savage (MI) were interviewed for an article, "Weight plus snickering equals pain" in the same Lansing State Journal on Nov. 3. Jerry Lamb participated in three radio programs around the same time. One show also guested Jennifer Rose (MI). Excellent newspaper coverage of NAAFA and of several Michigan members was also provided in two articles on November 2 by the Detroit News People Section. Judy Dover, Norman Petri and Sherry Kessler (MI) were interviewed and photographed for the article.

NAAFA received mention in U.S. News & World Report for the third time in our history--this time on Feb. 9 in its book review of Hillel Schwartz' Never Satisfied, a book about America's obsession with dieting. Sounds like an interesting book!

Dr. Paul Ernsberger appeared as the guest of Nancy Roberts, author of Breaking All the Rules, on her radio show, Large as Life. The subjects discussed were yo-yo dieting, diet frauds, and weight-loss surgery; the show was aired on New York and other places in early January, and resulted in 3,720 telephone calls to the station's switchboard.

NAAFAns Roxanne Ronsvalle and Judy Ryan were interviewed and photographed for the Ithaca (NY) Times (Nov. 5). Their local group, called People at Large, also sponsored a lecture titled, "Dieting: America's Futile Fetish" by Prof. David Levitsky of Cornell University on Oct. 30. The lecture was attended by 60 people, and included an introduction by NAAFAn Martha Wolga, a therapist who specializes in treating eating disorders and weight problems. Ryan and Ronsvalle say they hope to eventually apply for a local NAAFA chapter in the Ithaca area.

The Columbus Dispatch (Dec. 14) carried a story about Geneva Chapman (OH) and her cartoon character Ms. Hipps, which has appeared in a number of chapter publications and other places, and appears to be the first authentic cartoon in the size acceptance movement to be published regularly (others have been published, but were either not regular, or began after Ms. Hipps). Chapman is also known for her well-received musical production of "All Fat Ladies Ain't in the Circus" at last year's convention in Cleveland, Ohio.

NOW IN PREPARATION - Sally Jessy Raphael's syndicated TV show has just taped another show on fat people who've found happiness in life. The guests included NAAFA's Vice-President Paula Dachis and Jerry Lamb, head of the Fat Men's Forum (SIG) and Mid-Michigan Chapter Chairman. Watch local TV announcements for the show, which is seen on a delayed schedule in many cities.

An interview with NAAFA President Eileen M. Lefebure is slated for distribution in the Netherlands in March or April. The Netherlands Press Association was especially concerned about the popularity of weight loss surgery despite the known risks and despite Dr. Ernsberger's paper on the subject.

(Information for this column is supplied by the Publicity Committee, Eileen M. Lefebure, Chairperson; and NAAFAns who mail us news clippings and items from around the country.)

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OTHER MEDIA ITEMS - Are men attracted to "overweight" women? Readers of Glamour magazine (Jan. '87) were told that "at other times in history, voluptuous women were considered alluring. Many men still find such women beautiful." These comments, and more, were written for the "Sex & Health" column.

Nationally syndicated columnist William Safire, writing about political issues on Feb. 19, suggested that the former Senate majority leader, Howard Baker, should "knock a few inches off his waist." After Safire's column was written, Mr. Baker replaced Donald Regan as President Reagan's chief of staff. (If Baker has a weight problem, Reagan apparently doesn't mind.) Safire also mentions former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld as a possible dark horse candidate for president, citing his experience "hands-on managing the pharmaceutical company that came up with the artificial sweetener now in most diet drinks." He is talking about Nutrasweet...

According to the weekly tabloid newspaper World Weekly News (Mar. 3), two fat sisters who were members of a church congregation in the Netherlands assaulted a new minister who delivered a stinging sermon against obesity. The assault is said to have taken place in Amsterdam during the conclusion of the sermon. One parishioner was quoted as saying that the minister was "very arrogant and self-righteous... he said that fat people are lazy, selfish slobs who show a lack of respect for God by failing to care for the body He gave them. Finally, one of the two sisters shouted, 'That's enough, you jerk!' and charged the pulpit." The police had to be summoned. The minister sustained several injuries including a broken rib.

According to the Reuters news agency (Dec. 23), a \$556-million national Christmas lottery in Spain is known as El Gordo--the fat one. Sounds like another example of a positive use for the word "fat"--in which size is an advantage!

A cover story in the widely-read National Enquirer (Jan. 20) carried the surprising news that "Artificial Sweeteners Can Make You GAIN Weight!" What made it surprising was that it was printed at all, considering the clout of the artificial sweetener manufacturers. But it was hard for the Enquirer to overlook the results of a study of the American Cancer Society, which studied nearly 80,000 women. (Other studies exist, of course; Bennett and Gurin wrote on the subject in their book, The Dieter's Dilemma, and also in American Health magazine some time ago.) What is less surprising is the fact that the American press has not made the report a cover story...

A report, also in the National Enquirer (Feb. 10), mentions the concern by "Cagney & Lacey" TV executives over the extra weight of star Tyne Daley, apparently acquired during her pregnancy, and not lost after delivery. We'd always admired Daley's acting abilities, regardless of her size; but we had also thought she's been looking kinda cute lately...

An article in San-Diego-based Executive Health Report (Oct. 1986) by science writer Lawrence Galton, told about "Quick Weight-Reducing Diets, Books, Potions, Gadgets, and Other Assorted Nonsense." Overall, the article was a very evenhanded and fair attempt to present what is really known about obesity.

The NAAFA Newsletter qualifies for mention in this media column. After reviewing a number of past issues, we have concluded that it would be difficult to keep abreast of the news in "fat liberation" without including this publication on your reading list--whether or not you agree with everything that appears within its pages.

The publication Celebrity Hairstyles Special #3 - Diet & Exercise, currently on newsstands, prints all the usual nonsense of that type of publication, except for one: On page 10, right next to a full-page ad for Cambridge Diet formula--yes, like Dracula, it's still alive!--a headline says: "SELF ESTEEM: The Best Diet Pill There Is." Now, the article says a lot of things that NAAFA has been saying for years (except for the implication, which isn't actually stated in the article, that you can lose weight permanently if you can only get self esteem). This is the first time we've seen the words "self esteem" be used prominently in one of those diet magazines...

Some notes on the current issue of Carole Shaw's BBW magazine (April '87). The magazine generally does a good job of presenting fashions and lifestyles for the larger woman. Three good articles by BBW former editor Janey Milstead add depth to the issue. The cancellation of the BBW Lifestyle Convention in March reveals that the best-laid plans of anyone can go astray. F.A.'s take note: A really smashing photo of a plumpkin posing in the new BBW lingerie Collection at Sears could almost qualify for BUF magazine. We wish Carole well with her new line, but would have been happier if she and Sears could have seen fit to include 4X and 5X as well. Very large models in BBW seem to be a thing of the past. By contrast, MAGNA magazine, for big and tall men, currently shows some male models well over 300 pounds...

Radiance magazine is always worth mentioning. The new spring issue features the theme: "The Image As Given: Artists Celebrate The Full Female Figure." An outstanding issue--but the publication is so in tune with NAAFA's goals, that it's a shame to miss even one edition. Get it!

A new film called Eat and Run has just been released. It's a comedy about a 400 pound alien who eats people. The alien, called Murray Creature, is played by a 400-pound bald actor named R. L. Ryan. Ryan's weight constitutes one of the bad jokes in the film, but apparently there are plenty of other bad jokes as well--film critics are advising moviegoers to eat a pizza instead of seeing Eat and Run.

The internationally-recognized actor-rabbit Bugs Bunny starred in "The Bugs Bunny Thanksgiving Diet" on CBS-TV in late November. The objective of the show was to provide advice for avoiding holiday gluttony. Millicent, the amorous fat rabbit from "Slobbovia" was shown as a typical glutton. Sounds like Bugs was better off when he taunted short, bald men with a speech impediment, like Elmer Fudd. Or, maybe we would be better off with humor that doesn't ridicule anyone!

That's all, folks! ☐

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NEWSLETTER STAFF

Managing Editor:	Nancy Summer
Activism Editor:	Peggy Williams
Health Editor:	Paul Ernsberger, Ph.D.
Media Editor:	William J. Fabrey
Support Editor:	June Bailey